

A STRATEGIC EXAMINATION OF THE PUNITIVE EXPEDITION
INTO MEXICO, 1916 - 1917

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
Military History and Strategy

by

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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
2003

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MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

A STRATEGIC EXAMINATION OF THE PUNITIVE EXPEDITION INTO MEXICO, 1916-1917, by MAJ John M. Cyrulik, 83 pages.

This thesis examines the strategy of the United States Army's Punitive Expedition into Mexico following the raid on Columbus, New Mexico, by Francisco "Pancho" Villa and his followers on 9 March 1916. In analyzing this topic, the thesis focuses on the roles and inter-relationship of the three men most responsible for the strategic direction of the campaign. President Woodrow Wilson, Secretary of War Newton Diehl Baker, and Chief of Staff of the Army Hugh Scott all played essential roles in the formation, conduct, and ultimate outcome of the expedition. This study analyzes the orders authorizing the expedition, and the limitations placed on the actions of the U.S. forces in Mexico by President Wilson and War Department officials. This study concludes that the Punitive Expedition, although largely an operational success, was a strategic miscalculation and the potential benefits of the operation did not outweigh the risks of triggering a general war with Mexico. A major war with Mexico was narrowly averted on two occasions by the actions of Major General Scott and the steadfast determination of President Wilson.

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PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the strategy of the United States Army's Punitive Expedition into Mexico following the raid on Columbus, New Mexico, by Francisco "Pancho" Villa and his followers on 9 March 1916. The study will focus on the roles and inter-relationship of the three men most responsible for the strategic direction of the campaign: President Woodrow Wilson, Secretary of War Newton Diehl Baker, and Chief of Staff of the Army Hugh Scott. The men represent an incredible trio of dissimilar men who approached the strategic dilemmas of the expedition from very different perspectives.

In analyzing the strategy of the Punitive Expedition, the thesis will begin with an overview of U.S.-Mexican relations, an introduction of the main characters, and a description of the situation on the border in 1915-1916. This background information will be followed by a study of President Wilson's decision to order the Punitive Expedition into Mexico and the War Department's influence on this decision. The analysis of Wilson's decision will be followed by an examination of the crises resulting from combat between U.S. and Mexican forces at Parral and Carrizal on 12 April and 21 June 1916, respectively. The fighting at Parral and Carrizal resulted in the mobilization of over 140,000 soldiers from the Organized Militia and National Guard of the United States and led the two countries to the brink of war during the summer of 1916. The thesis will finish with an examination of the decision to end the operation, followed by conclusions concerning how the three men who are the focus of this study are responsible for the results of the expedition. Throughout the thesis, brief descriptions of the tactical situation

and actions of the Army forces in Mexico led by Brigadier General John J. Pershing will be described only as necessary to provide the framework for the strategic context.

An analysis of the Punitive Expedition's strategy is useful for three main reasons. First, the United States will likely find itself conducting similar operations in response to future terrorist attacks against United States citizens and interests. Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, for example, began as fundamentally a punitive expedition ordered after the attacks of 11 September 2001. Second, the Punitive Expedition into Mexico is a valuable case study when examining the strategic challenges of conducting operations in a semi-permissive or hostile environment against non-state actors within a struggling or failing state, as was the case in Mexico during 1916-1917. Third, the United States military continues to operate along the Mexican border, with soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines assigned to duty as members of Joint Task Force Six providing Department of Defense counterdrug support to federal, regional, state and local law enforcement agencies.

I became interested in the Punitive Expedition during the summer of 2002 while reading Max Boot's book *The Savage Wars of Peace*. Subsequent research revealed that the majority of the writing on the Punitive Expedition focuses on the engagements and movements of Pershing's and Villa's forces in Mexico and that the strategy of the expedition has been somewhat overlooked. Perhaps this is because there is no commonly accepted view on whether the expedition was a strategic success, a failure, or something in-between. The varying opinions concerning the degree of success of the expedition further motivated me to research this subject.

A variety of sources were used in this project. The most comprehensive study of the Punitive Expedition is Robert Bruce Johnson's dissertation entitled *The Punitive Expedition: A military, diplomatic and political history of Pershing's chase after Pancho Villa, 1916-1917*. The other sources can be divided into three general categories: those works discussing United States and Mexican relations; biographies and letters of Wilson, Baker, and Scott; and accounts of the Punitive Expedition. Each category contains both primary and secondary source material. John S.D. Eisenhower's *Intervention! : The United States and the Mexican Revolution 1913-1917*, which uses mainly American sources, and Joseph A. Stout's *Border Conflict: Villistas, Carrancistas, and the Punitive Expedition, 1915-1920*, which uses chiefly Mexican sources, supplied information for the background of U.S.-Mexican relations. The *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States* for 1916 and 1917 and the 48-volume set of *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* provided the primary source material for this thesis. Works regarding the three main characters included Major General Scott's *Some Memoirs of a Soldier*, Clarence H. Cramer's *Newton D. Baker*, and several volumes by Arthur S. Link, the preeminent Woodrow Wilson historian, including *Wilson: Confusion and Crises 1915-1916*. Dr. Link's exhaustive work is indispensable for anyone conducting research related to Woodrow Wilson. Key to understanding Wilson's use of military force are two works by Frederick S. Calhoun, *Power and Principle: Armed Intervention in Wilsonian Foreign policy* and *Use of Force and Wilsonian Foreign Policy*. Several accounts of the tactical field operations led by General Pershing are available. The two primarily used in this study are *The Mexican Punitive Expedition under Brigadier General John J. Pershing, United States Army, 1916-1917* by Robert S. Thomas and Inez S. Allen from the Office

of the Chief of Military History and the official *Report by Major General John J. Pershing, Commanding, of the Punitive Expedition*. In addition, this study makes use of the *War Department Annual Reports*, including the specific reports from the Secretary of War and Chief of Staff of the Army for 1916 and 1917.

I would like to thank several individuals whom without their support this thesis would not have been completed. First and foremost is my thesis committee chairman, Dr. Lawrence Yates from the Combat Studies Institute of the United States Army Command and General Staff College. Dr Yates is a consummate professional whose dedication to the field of military history is infectious and his support has been invaluable. I am also indebted to my other committee members, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Tracey and Lieutenant Colonel Alan Lowe who were always available, ensured my efforts remained focused, and offered valuable critique of my research and writing. My wife Lisa and I were blessed with the birth on our first child as I began researching and writing on the Punitive Expedition. Without her untiring support and patience over the months of work that followed this project would have never succeeded. In addition to those mentioned above, many faculty and staff of the Command and General Staff College were positive influences on this academic effort. Sincere thanks to all.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

On 9 March 1916, the Mexican revolutionary Francisco “Pancho” Villa and approximately five hundred followers, known as Villistas, crossed into the United States and attacked the town of Columbus, New Mexico, killing seventeen Americans. The raid on Columbus was not just a simple act of banditry, nor was it totally unexpected. Villa’s attack was one of several violent events that reflected the turbulent relationship between Mexico and the United States encompassing the previous seventy years. The raid on Columbus would trigger President Woodrow Wilson to order a punitive expedition of over 10,000 U.S. Army troops into Mexico to capture or kill Villa and his men. The presence of this large American force operating in Mexico led the United States and Mexico to the verge of a general war, which was only narrowly averted.

The tumultuous relationship between the United States and Mexico that provides the long-term context for Villa’s raid on Columbus was the product of a sequence of military and diplomatic actions that began with the Mexican War of 1846 - 1848. The U.S. - Mexican war ensured that the fates of both nations would be permanently intertwined. One of the principal causes of the war American’s hunger for territory. This American appetite for additional lands in the 19th is often referred to as Manifest Destiny, a term used by leaders and politicians in the 1840s to explain and justify the ideal of continental expansion. In one attempt to fulfill the American Manifest Destiny, the United States declared war and invaded Mexico in 1846.

The war was an overwhelming success for the United States. In a series of successive routs, General Winfield Scott's Army defeated Mexican forces led by Generalissimo Antonio López de Santa Anna at Vera Cruz, Cerro Gordo, Contreras and Churubusco, and Chapultepec. In September 1847, the Americans occupied Mexico City. With U.S. troops in the Mexican capital, serious negotiations to end the war began in January 1848 and resulted in the ratification of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo by both the Mexican Congress and United States Senate in 1848. The treaty fixed the Rio Grande as the Mexican boundary with Texas and required that Mexico cede to the United States, in return for \$15 million, a vast tract of land that included the modern-day states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming. In addition to the land, the United States gained as new residents as many as 75,000 Mexicans who lived in the conquered areas. Mexico lost nearly half of its territory, and the defeat shattered national honor and dignity, which resulted in a deep resentment towards Americans. The long-felt repercussions of the war inevitable surfaced in the Mexican Revolution sixty years later and contributed to the disturbing acts of violence against Americans in the border regions.¹ The quote "Poor Mexico. So far from God and so near the United States," reflected the mood of many Mexicans during this time and would prove prophetic some sixty-five years later.²

Within Mexico, the period between the end of the U.S.-Mexican war and the beginning of the Mexican Revolution witnessed the downfall of the Second Mexican Empire, civil war between 1858-1860, and a French invasion from 1862-1866. A liberal republic was established in 1867 and lasted until 1876, when General José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz overthrew the civilian president. Díaz ruled Mexico for the next thirty-five

years, and his time in power was characterized by stability and exceptional economic growth. However, by 1910 his total control of Mexico's government institutions and perceived widespread corruption led to growing civil unrest and served as a catalyst for the Mexican Revolution.³

The Mexican Revolution began on 20 November 1910 when a popular political figure, Francisco Madero, called for constitutional reform and the overthrow of the Díaz regime. This call for action precipitated an uprising in several Mexican states. By this time the Mexican dictator had lost support of both the army and the working people who had been two of his main sources of power. The revolutionaries succeeded in deposing Díaz in June 1911, and Madero was elected president later that same year. The prospects for a peaceful conclusion to the revolution ended, however, when Madero was murdered on 22 February 1913, only thirteen months after assuming the presidency. General Victor Huerta, who led a group of regular army officers that had planned the overthrow of the government, ordered Madero's murder.⁴ Following the assassination, the generals who organized the coup d'état appointed General Huerta as the next president of Mexico. This outraged Madero's supporters and infuriated the new President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, who believed the Mexican people had the right to determine the outcome of the Mexican Revolution, not Huerta and the Mexican military.

The accession of Huerta marked the beginning of American involvement in the Mexican Revolution. Up until that time, U.S. attitudes were largely held that the Mexican Revolution was an internal social struggle to be solved by the Mexicans. The U.S. government under President William Howard Taft, despite the unauthorized machinations of the U.S. ambassador to Mexico in the plot against Madero, adopted a

non-interventionist “hands off” strategy with regards to the Mexican situation. The inauguration of President Woodrow Wilson on 4 March 1913 signified a major change in U.S. foreign policy.

The twenty-eighth President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson was a devout Christian, history professor, past president of Princeton University, and former governor of New Jersey. Wilson’s campaign for president revolved around a proposed domestic agenda known as the New Freedom, with little emphasis on foreign affairs.⁵ Ironically, the world situation at the dawn of his presidency would prevent him from devoting his time and energies solely on a domestic program. President Wilson’s Progressive Era idealism and Presbyterian ethics shaped American foreign policy during his first years in office. He believed the United States had a moral obligation to help the oppressed achieve democracy, especially in the Western Hemisphere, and Mexico was a case in point. Wilson once told a visiting British envoy, “I will teach the South American republics to elect good men!” He believed that democracy and constitutional government, based on the United States model, would bring lasting stability to the Western Hemisphere. This democratic ideology, coupled with his belief in the universal right of self-determination, became the central theme of Wilson’s foreign policy in Mexico.⁶ According to Joseph Tumulty, the president’s private secretary, there were two principles that shaped Wilson’s Mexican policy. These were “The firm conviction that all nations, both weak and the powerful, have the inviolable right to control their international affairs” coupled with “The belief, established from a history of the world, that Mexico will never become a peaceful and law-abiding neighbor of the United States until she has

been permitted to achieve a permanent and basic settlement of her troubles without outside interference.”⁷

Eight days after being sworn in as President, Woodrow Wilson issued his

Declaration of Policy in Regards to Latin America, in which he stated:

Cooperation is only possible when supported at every turn by the orderly process of just government based upon law, not upon arbitrary or irregular force. We hold, as I am sure all thoughtful leaders of republican governments everywhere hold, that just government rests always upon the consent of the governed, and that there can be no freedom without order based upon law and upon the public conscience and approval. We shall look to make these principles the basis of mutual intercourse, respect, and helpfulness between our sister republics and ourselves. . . . *We can have no sympathy with those who seek to seize the power of government to advance their own personal interests or ambition.*”⁸

This rhetoric was intended to send a message to Mexico and other countries in turmoil.

President Wilson was appalled at the bloody way Huerta had come to power and was determined to see him removed from the presidency. Wilson was ready to assist Mexico in efforts to install a democratic, constitutional government based on the United States model. The American president began to look for ways to pressure Huerta to speed his removal from office. Wilson refused to recognize the dictator’s government formally and urged other governments to do the same. Wilson also continued the Mexican arms embargo started in 1912, hoping that a shortage of weapons and supplies would help cripple the Huerta government, which was involved in heavy fighting against Constitutionalists led by several charismatic leaders, including Venustiano Carranza and Pancho Villa. The American president also took advantage of events off the Mexican coast to order a U.S. military intervention.

The opportunity for this armed intervention came on 9 April 1914, when eight U.S. Navy sailors, who were manning a whaleboat from the U.S.S. *Dolphin*, were

arrested and detained by Mexican authorities at the port of Tampico, Mexico. The detention of the sailors, seen as a slap in the face to American honor, served as an excellent pretext for Wilson to send the military to Mexico to hasten the downfall of Huerta. An American force sailed south with the mission to occupy the vital commercial center and port city of Vera Cruz and to seize an important arms shipment en route to Huerta's forces. When U.S. forces came ashore at Vera Cruz on 21 April 1914, poorly trained and equipped Mexican troops opposed the occupation. In the minor battles that followed the initial landings, 22 Americans were killed and 70 were wounded. By 27 April 1914, however, the Mexicans had lost control of the city, the U.S. flag was raised over the port, and martial law was imposed. With an American military government responsible for the administration of Vera Cruz, the Americans had been inexorably drawn into the Mexican Revolution.

President Huerta's situation in Mexico continued to deteriorate. The occupation of Vera Cruz had the desired effect, severely curtailing trade and customs revenues, along with limiting the flow of arms and ammunition to Huerta's forces. The resolute Constitutionalists formed three main armies, one each led by Venustiano Carranza, Pancho Villa, and Álvaro Obregón, and marched towards Mexico City. Huerta's situation ultimately became untenable and he resigned on 10 July 1914, fleeing to Europe with his family and leaving Mexico in chaos. President Wilson got what he wanted – Huerta forced out of power and the Constitutionalists in control of Mexico. With Huerta gone, Wilson ordered an end to the U.S. occupation of Vera Cruz, and on 23 November control of the port city was turned back over to the Mexican authorities. Unfortunately, the

leading figures in the Constitutionalist movement, did not agree on a power sharing framework or who would be the next Mexican national chief.

The struggle among the Constitutionalists to determine who would follow Huerta as the political leader of Mexico was a scene of relentless factional infighting and political intrigue that failed to bring stability to the country. President Wilson eventually decided to support Venustiano Carranza, which led the United States to recognize the de facto Carranza government in October 1915. This move resulted in the alienation of Carranza's occasional ally, Pancho Villa, who divorced himself from the Constitutionalists and fled north to his power base, where he maintained control over most of northern Mexico.

Francisco "Pancho" Villa, the man who precipitated the major crisis between the United States and Mexico in 1916, is often a subject of much exaggerated folklore and legend. Villa was born in 1878 in the rural Mexican village of Rio Grande to poor parents. He spent several months in prison during 1895 and joined a small band of outlaws operating in Durango and Southwest Chihuahua. He spent most of the next twenty years as a bandit. During November 1910, he began service as an officer in the revolutionary army, where his battlefield courage and exploits became legendary. By late 1913, Villa had become the leader of the revolutionary army of northern Mexico opposed to Huerta. On 8 December, his men captured Chihuahua City, which was a major loss for the government. This victory vaulted Villa's status to one of the three main revolutionary leaders, and his rise to power in northern Mexico was complete. During this time, he met with several influential American political and military leaders to discuss the future of

Mexico and its dealings with the United States. Villa's cordial relations with the United States ended abruptly when Wilson recognized the de facto Carranza government.⁹

Villa was incensed that the Americans supported Carranza, and he was determined to make the U.S. pay for their decision.¹⁰ By the end of 1915, the situation in Mexico was increasingly chaotic, and it was clear that more violence was inevitable. Wilson believed that having Carranza as First Chief was a step in the right direction toward the goal of a stable and democratic Mexico, and the recognition of Carranza's de facto government seemed to many Mexicans to signal the end of American involvement in the revolution.¹¹ However, Pancho Villa and his remaining followers, who were living along the U.S. - Mexican border in January 1916, were determined to prove otherwise. Villa was already planning his next deadly moves against the Carrancistas and Americans.

By late 1915, President Wilson was becoming more comfortable with using military force for limited means. The seven-month occupation of Vera Cruz, the U.S. military supervision of general elections in the Dominican Republic during October 1914, and the invasion and occupation of Haiti beginning in 1915 were examples of Wilson's democratic ideology leading to limited military intervention. These limited interventions were distasteful to many in the U.S. military establishment and often placed various interests within the War Department and President Wilson at odds over the roles and missions of the armed forces. When the President ordered the occupation of Vera Cruz, many senior officers believed it to be the opening move of a second Mexican War; they hoped that instructions to march on Mexico City would soon follow the initial landings. Wilson, believing in the right of self-determination of the Mexican people and reading

the reports of the Mexican opposition to the landings at Vera Cruz, would have none of it. In fact, he was furious when it was discovered that the Army War College Division of the General Staff, which was responsible for developing the nation's war plans, had devoted much time and effort in constructing a plan for the invasion and occupation of all of Mexico, followed by the establishment of a U.S. military government to end the revolution.¹² The invasion plan required over 246,000 troops, "if the territory is to be completely occupied by our troops, and a stable government established."¹³ Fortunately, Wilson had a very able Chief of Staff of the Army, Major General Hugh Scott, to reign in the military planners.

Major General Hugh L. Scott, United States Military Academy class of 1876, was at the pinnacle of his distinguished career at the end of 1915. He had been a cavalry officer in the field for most of his service, with extensive combat experience against the Indians and in the Philippines. General Scott served as the superintendent of West Point from 1906 to 1910 and became Chief of Staff of the Army in November 1914. He also had a reputation as a skilled negotiator, and he represented the U.S. government favorably on several occasions during important discussions with American Indians.

Scott had already played an important role in the U.S.- Mexican affairs, having made several trips to the border region to meet with Mexican revolutionaries and report the status of the situation to Washington. From November 1914 to January 1915, he conferred with Mexican leaders to discuss the protection of the international border.¹⁴ He was recognized by Wilson to be an expert on Mexico, and on one occasion, the President sent Scott to survey the state of affairs and make a determination of who was stronger, Carranza or Villa. Scott expressed some regard for Villa and believed the revolutionary

was “susceptible to good influences.” Scott also felt he had developed “excellent relations with Obregón” during a series of secret meetings with the Mexican general in July 1915 to discuss the future relationship between the two countries.¹⁵ Scott, as a result of the personal relationships that he cultivated with Mexican leaders, found he had more experience dealing with Villa and Obregón than any other Washington official during the crisis of 1916.¹⁶

Scott was also “greatly admired and liked” by Wilson and had become a powerful influence inside Washington.¹⁷ Following the simultaneous resignations of Secretary of War Lindley Miller Garrison and Assistant Secretary Henry S. Breckinridge on 10 February 1916 over the issue of national preparedness, General Scott served as ad interim Secretary of War until 9 March 1916, which was coincidentally the day of the Villistas raid on Columbus. Scott’s short tenure as Acting Secretary of War marked the one exception of the twentieth century and the last time a uniformed officer served as head of the department. Scott’s wife once remarked to the spouses of Wilson’s Cabinet members that she was “living with three men and it is terrible.” She was lightheartedly referring to the fact that, for a time, Scott was simultaneously the Secretary of War, the Assistant Secretary of War, and the Chief of Staff of the Army.¹⁸ The new Secretary of War, Newton Diehl Baker, was undoubtedly grateful to have the advice of Major General Scott during the Mexican crisis.

Beginning in April 1915, as the revolutionary leaders began fighting among themselves, Villa’s forces suffered a series of major defeats by the Carrancistas, and these losses drove his Army of the North into an area southwest of El Paso, Texas, in the Mexican state of Chihuahua. On 1 November, near the border town of Agua Prieta,

Villa's army was again defeated, this time with the overt assistance of the United States, which allowed the unhindered transportation of Carrancistas reinforcements and supplies through U.S. territory.¹⁹ On 21 November, at the Battle of Hermosillo, Villa's once formidable army was shattered by the Carrancistas and ceased to be an effective fighting force. The survivors fled into the hills, while Villa and a small group returned to Chihuahua City before following the remnants of the Villistas in heading for the high ground. Carranza stated publicly that Villa had to be eliminated and ordered government troops to continue their pursuit until he was killed or captured.²⁰ The U.S. assistance to Carranza's forces in November further enraged Villa and he began planning his revenge in earnest. It wouldn't be long before his first acts of vengeance against Americans struck the border region. However, Villa wasn't the only threat to American citizens and property during this time.

While the Carrancistas were attacking and destroying Villa's army in Chihuahua and Sonora, various acts of violence targeting Americans were plaguing the border region. The area of the U.S.-Mexican border had become a very dangerous place. According to the U.S. Department of State, forty-seven Americans were killed in Mexico between 1910 and 1912. From 1913 to 1915, this number had increased to seventy-six. On the U.S. side of the border, thirty-six Americans and ninety-two Mexicans were reported killed as a result of border troubles.²¹ The five years of revolution turned the area on the Mexican side into a generally lawless land, full of bandit groups and armed revolutionary factions, who rarely hesitated to cross into the United States to commit raids, cattle rustling, and robberies. The violence continued to escalate at an alarming rate. During the second half of 1915 alone, twenty-five incidents were reported and

eleven Americans were killed.²² These acts led to rising tensions between the de facto Carranza government and members of the Wilson Administration, many of whom believed that Carranza could do more to control the border. These scattered incidents of murder and banditry, although disturbing, would pale in comparison to the Villistas first act of retribution that targeted the United States for its support of Carranza.

On 9 January 1916, the world would become fully aware of Villa's hatred and obsession to kill Americans as a price for the U.S. government's de facto recognition and support of Carranza. A train carrying eighteen American and twenty Mexican employees from the American-owned Cusi Mining Company was stopped by Villistas near the station of Santa Isabel by Villistas after it had left Chihuahua City en route to the mines. The American passengers were taken from the train, some were shot as they tried to escape, and the remaining others were lined up and summarily executed. Only one of the Americans on the train survived. He and twenty unharmed Mexicans reported the attackers shouting "Viva Villa" and "Death to the Gringos" as they murdered the seventeen men.

The massacre at Santa Isabel, coupled with other acts of violence targeting Americans in the border region, created strong pressure on President Wilson to take military action to protect Americans in the area. Both public opinion and several important members of Congress called for intervention. The President resisted, believing that intervention at this time would upset the rebirth of troubled Mexico, whose citizens had the right to self-determination without direct American involvement or coercion. This was a difficult position to defend under the circumstances, but Wilson would not change his mind. Demands to intervene faded once reports were received from Mexico that

Carranza had taken swift action by ordering the perpetrators of the massacre hunted down, captured, and executed.²³

After the Santa Isabel massacre, the situation along the border became eerily quiet, resembling the tense calm before a storm. A rumor of future attacks spread through the area. Pancho Villa had thus far failed to provoke the Americans into invading Mexico, which he hoped would result in fighting between his two worst enemies, the U.S. and Carranza governments. Villa was a fighter, and the introduction of U.S. troops into northern Mexico would provide additional targets of opportunity on which to extract his vengeance. Never a patient man, Villa was already planning his next major attack, a daring raid three miles inside U.S. territory on the small border town of Columbus, New Mexico.²⁴

¹Robert Ryal Miller. "The War Between the United States and Mexico." [Online] Available <http://www.pbs.org/kera/usmexicanwar/mainframe.html>, 1998.

²Herbert Molloy Mason, Jr. *The Great Pursuit* (New York: Random House, 1970), iii.

³Leslie Bethell, ed., *Mexico Since Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 47-48.

⁴John S.D. Eisenhower, *Intervention!: The United States and the Mexican Revolution 1913-1917* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), xiii.

⁵Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson: A Brief Biography* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1963), 59,71.

⁶Frederick S. Calhoun, *Power and Principle: Armed Intervention in Wilsonian Foreign Policy* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1986), 72-73.

⁷Joseph P. Tumulty, *Woodrow Wilson as I Know Him* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1921), 145.

⁸*Ibid.*, 145. Italics included in the original.

⁹For a comprehensive study of Pancho Villa, see Clarence C. Clendenen, *The United States and Pancho Villa: A Study in Unconventional Diplomacy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961.)

¹⁰Robert B. Johnson, *The Punitive Expedition: A Military, Diplomatic and Political History of Pershing's Chase After Pancho Villa, 1916-1917* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1981), 8.

¹¹Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: Confusion and Crises 1915-1916* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 195.

¹²Johnson, *The Punitive Expedition*, 97.

¹³Calhoun, *Power and Principle*, 43.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁵Hugh L. Scott, *Some Memories of a Soldier* (New York: Appleton Century, 1928), 502-3.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 518-19.

¹⁷Josephus Daniels, *The Wilson Era: Years of Peace, 1910-1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 446-47.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Johnson, *The Punitive Expedition*, 8.

²⁰Joseph A. Stout Jr. *Border Conflict: Villistas, Carrancistas, and the Punitive Expedition, 1915-1920* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1999), 21.

²¹Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1916* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925), 476-78.

²²Eisenhower, *Intervention!*, 211.

²³Link, *Confusion and Crises*, 200-203.

²⁴Robert S. Thomas and Inez V. Allen, *The Mexican Punitive Expedition under Brigadier General John J. Pershing, United States Army, 1916-1917* (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1954), I-15.

CHAPTER 2

PRESIDENT WILSON AUTHORIZES THE PUNITIVE EXPEDITION

Villa completed the detailed planning for a raid on Columbus, New Mexico, by the end of February 1916. He began his approach march to the border town on 1 March with an attacking force consisting of approximately 500 experienced horsemen, some of whom had been loyal to him for years. Traveling predominately during the hours of darkness, Villa and his men were able by 7 March to occupy a largely undetected position south of the U.S. --Mexican border across from Columbus. Then Villa issued final instructions and exhortations to his men that night, encouraging them with the call, "Let us kill them ten for one!" His men responded by shouting "Death to the Gringos."¹ The attack on Columbus began at 4:15 on the morning of 9 March. The Villistas descended upon the town and began shooting the residents and burning the town's buildings.

Fortunately for the townspeople, approximately 190 soldiers from the U.S. Army's Thirteen Cavalry Regiment were stationed in Columbus. The troopers quickly recovered from the initial surprise of the attack, began returning fire, mounted up, and eventually pursued Villa and his men back across the border. The fighting in Columbus lasted just under two hours, and the hot pursuit continued until the exhausted U.S. cavalymen returned to the town at 3:15 in the afternoon.² Villa's casualties were approximately one hundred men killed and thirty captured. A total of eighteen Americans were killed, including eight civilians and ten cavalymen.³ The news of the raid on Columbus traveled fast. Within three hours of the attack, the Deputy Customs Collector

in Columbus sent the initial report of what had happened, and by late morning, most officials in Washington had received the disturbing news.

The report of the Columbus raid arrived in Washington at 9:00 a.m. The one-hundred word message described the scene:

Columbus attacked this morning, 4:30 o'clock. Citizens murdered. Repulsed about 6 o'clock. Town partly burned. They have retreated to the west. Unable to say how many were killed. Department of Justice informed that between 400 and 500 Villa troops attacked Columbus, New Mexico about 4:30. Villa probably in charge. Three American soldiers killed and several injured; also killed four civilians and wounded four. Several of the attacking party killed and wounded by our forces. Attacking party also burned depot and principal buildings in Columbus. United States soldiers now pursuing attacking parties across the line into Mexico. No prisoners reported taken alive.⁴

As further reports of what had happened in New Mexico began to arrive in Washington, the recently sworn-in Secretary of War, Newton Baker, was experiencing the first day in his new office at the War Department.

Wilson needed a new Secretary of War since Lindley Miller Garrison and his assistant Henry S. Breckenridge had resigned in protest during the national preparedness controversy. Garrison and Breckenridge had argued for a rapid military expansion, proposing a large federal reserve force that could be used in the event the United States entered the war in Europe.⁵ Wilson strongly opposed placing the nation on a wartime footing, agreeing with those who argued that mobilizing the military could be seen as a provocative move that might encourage Germany to declare war on the United States.

On 5 March 1916, while in Cleveland, Ohio, Baker received a telegram that read:

Would you accept Secretaryship of War. Earnestly hope that you can see your way to do so. It would greatly strengthen my hand. Woodrow Wilson.⁶

On 9 March, Baker had spent part of the morning at the White House, where he was unsuccessful at persuading President Wilson to withdraw his name as Secretary of War. Wilson was convinced he had made the correct choice, and Baker's argument fell on deaf ears. The President ended the conversation with "Are you ready to be sworn in?" and Baker headed to the War Department, unaware of the situation along the border.⁷

The new Secretary of War was, at first glance, an unlikely candidate to head the United States military, in that he had no international, diplomatic, or military experience whatsoever. Newton Diehl Baker was born in Martinsburg, West Virginia, on 3 December 1871, attended Johns Hopkins and Washington and Lee Universities, receiving a law degree from the latter in 1894. He was a successful lawyer and practiced in both Martinsburg and Cleveland, Ohio. In 1912, he was elected mayor of Cleveland on a Progressive Movement platform. He had played an important role in national party politics as one of the key figures that had won the presidential nomination for Wilson at the Democratic National Convention in 1912.⁸ He was also an avowed pacifist, remarking boldly to the Reserve Officer Association in 1916 that:

I am a pacifist. I am a pacifist in my hope; I am a pacifist in my prayers; I am a pacifist in my belief that God made man for better things than that a civilization should always be under the blight of this increasingly deadly destruction which war leaves us.⁹

The president believed that, given the American political climate and state of world affairs, Baker's values and background made him an excellent selection for Secretary of War. First, Baker's pacifist tendency would cause him to move cautiously towards any American involvement in the Great War, which Wilson was desperately trying to avoid. Second, his experiences as a lawyer and mayor of a large city would help when

negotiating large contracts for supplies and services, which was one of the Secretary of War's primary roles. With these qualifications, Baker arrived at the War Department to sign the appropriate papers and take the oath of office as the fifty-first Secretary of War.

Witnessing the swearing in of Secretary Baker was the Chief of Staff of the Army, Major General Hugh Scott. Baker, who had no knowledge of military affairs, was quick to establish a rapport with the general. Shortly after Baker was sworn-in, and in deference to the principle of civilian control of the military, Scott customarily offered his resignation as Chief of Staff. Baker then approached the elder general, commented that he did not want a new chief of staff, and said, "I am going to look up to you as to my father. I am going to do what you advise me, and if either of us have to leave this building, I am going first."¹⁰ This exchange set the tone of the relationship between the two men who would play major roles in the outcome of the Punitive Expedition. The formalities and introductions complete, they moved on to more pressing matters. Excited officers were bustling through the halls of the War Department, reading and then forwarding urgent message traffic that reported the raid on Columbus.

The government offices were not the only places to receive a timely report of what had happened at Columbus. George Seese, an Associated Press reporter, happened to be staying in a Columbus hotel when the attack occurred. He immediately sent a flash report of the raid across the wires to the nation's news offices. The response across the country was nearly unanimous; Americans everywhere demanded action to punish Villa and those responsible for the raid. Newspapers across the country echoed the sentiment of the *New York Times*, which wrote, "Villa must be suppressed. His villainous activities must be stopped for all time, and we must do it."¹¹ The *New York World's* view was

“Nothing less than Villa’s life can atone for the outrage at Columbus, N.M.” Similarly, the *New York Tribune* proclaimed, “Villa and his followers must be rounded up by our troops and made to pay the penalty of their hideous crimes against American citizens.”¹²

The *Los Angeles Times* published a poem by George M. Cohen, who offered:

Let’s quit talking of Kaisers and Kings,
Get Villa!
Let’s quit talking of all foreign things,
Get Villa!
Let’s quit talking political views,
Get Villa!
Let’s quit wasting our words to abuse,
Come, Americans – Christians, and Jews,
Get Villa!¹³

In addition to the press, some members of Congress reacted to the news of the Columbus attack in the same vein as the newspaper editorial pages. Reports of the raid on Columbus reached the floor of the Senate by the afternoon of 9 March, and reaction was immediate. Senator Albert B. Fall, a Republican from New Mexico and a known interventionist, began garnering support for a resolution that would authorize the recruiting of 500,000 volunteers to form an army that would invade Mexico and “aid existing authorities in stamping out the brigandage.” Senator Joseph T. Robinson, an influential democrat from Arkansas, remarked after hearing reports of the raid, “That means intervention. I don’t see what else can be done.”¹⁴ The rhetoric increased in ferocity on the morning of 10 March, when Senator Henry F. Ashurst, a Democrat from Arizona shouted, “I think the army ought to be sent into Mexico to bring Pancho Villa and his murderous cutthroats back dead or alive! They should be brought to Columbus, where they made a funeral pyre of American men and women, and there be shot on the spot.”¹⁵ Possibly more dangerous were the remarks by the Republican conference

chairman, Senator Jacob H. Gallinger, Republican from New Hampshire, who declared, “Our southern boundary is Panama, and we must move into Mexico to make our borders secure.”¹⁶ The tone was becoming increasingly bellicose on Capitol Hill, and everyone was waiting to hear from President Wilson.

Wilson’s reaction on 9 March to the situation along the border was deliberately subdued. The President’s papers show that he spent time on at least three other matters, including the Shields Water Power Bill and Chilean recommendations for a Pan American Treaty.¹⁷ Perhaps Wilson believed that given time, he would be able to defuse this situation, as he had following the Santa Isabel massacre in January 1916. Tensions were running similarly high following the execution of the seventeen American miners. Within a week, the President’s calmness regarding that situation had prevailed, and he was able to avoid ordering an intervention into Mexico. It is logical to assume that this experience influenced Wilson’s decision not to respond immediately. He also may have underestimated the incensed public and Congressional response. There was no cabinet meeting on 9 March, and no official statement was issued from the White House. According to Link, Secretary of State Robert Lansing likely passed word of the attack to the President by telephone, and then the two discussed the state of affairs at length.¹⁸ In contrast to the pace of events at the White House, activity in the War Department was rising to a fever pitch.

Anticipating that the President would order a military response, the Army General Staff worked through the night of 9 March preparing draft plans and orders to be issued to commanders in the field. The military options discussed varied widely, from a general invasion of Mexico using hundreds of thousands of troops for the purpose of restoring

order in the region on one end of the spectrum, to using a much smaller force to track down and capture Villa and his followers responsible for the Columbus raid.¹⁹ However, officers on the General Staff found themselves developing options for the use of limited military force without support from the nation's chief military planners of the Army War College Division.

The War College Division of the Army General Staff was a peculiar organization. When the General Staff was established in 1903 as a major part of Secretary of War Elihu Root's sweeping departmental reform package, the Congress limited the number of General Staff officers assigned to District of Columbia to twenty-seven, although the authorized strength of the staff was forty-four. As a result of this Congressional constraint, the decision was made to assign the members of the General Staff in excess of twenty-seven to the War College Division of the General Staff at Carlisle, Pennsylvania. These two bodies of men had different duties and responsibilities. The officers stationed in the District of Columbia served in the Office of the Chief of Staff and aided with the administration, coordination, and supervisory roles of the chief. The War College Division was responsible primarily for war planning and "to make the studies required for the mobilization, organization, instruction, training, and movement of our armies to gather military intelligence, and to investigate such special subjects as referred to it."²⁰ According to Bliss, who had served as the first president of the War College, the General Staff evolved between 1903 and 1916 "into minor groups which, as experience has shown, for one reason or another, had become more or less antagonistic."²¹ The specific reasons for the antagonism that developed between the War College planners and the officers stationed at the War Department are ambiguous, but clearly a differing view as to

the official responsibilities of each of the groups contributed to the tension. The animosity between the two groups of officers negatively impacted the War Department's development of recommendations in response to Villa's raid on Columbus.

Only five days before Villa's attack on Columbus, the War College Division completed an assessment of the situation in Mexico and a review of applicable war plans. The strategic planners were convinced that long-term security of the border region was possible only after a major invasion, which would be followed by a protracted pacification campaign. There was no support among the group for any limited intervention. The war planners wrote on 4 March 1916:

In armed intervention it is axiomatic that an overwhelming force used in vigorous field operations without costly pauses and directed straight and continuously at the organized field forces and centers of resources will most effectively and economically overcome organized resistance and make possible a more orderly and more economical period of pacification. . . . Our war plans accept this axiom. . . . To reject these plans, to use only a part of the plans, or to curtail the forces outlined in the plans, can but invite local disasters and delays lengthening the period of military operations, and make more costly in lives and treasure both this period and the period of pacification.²²

This conviction among the planners at the War College Division would affect the construction of the campaign plan to pursue Villa. Elsewhere in Washington, officials at the State Department were also burning the midnight oil in anticipation of a United States response to the Columbus raid.

The diplomats at the State Department, acting on guidance received on 9 March from Secretary Lansing, were focusing their efforts on gaining acceptance from the Carranza government in Mexico City for an American expeditionary force, that would enter Mexico to find and punish Villa and his men. Tensions between Washington and Mexico City were high, as both sides were wrestling with fundamental issues of

sovereignty and the responsibility of government to protect citizens and property. It was clear that neither side wanted a war, but Carranza could not openly support an American force operating in Mexico, an idea that was intolerable to many Mexicans. Carranza's predicament is clearly seen in an 11 March telegram to Lansing in which he stated, "There is no reason why, on account of the lamentable incident at Columbus, we should be carried to a declaration of war between the two countries. . . . There would be no justification for any invasion of Mexican territory by an armed force of the United States, not even under the pretext of pursuing and capturing Villa."²³ The flurry of diplomatic traffic continued for the next two days, as both countries tried to feel out each other's resolve on the issue.

The President convened an emergency cabinet meeting on the morning of 10 March to discuss the situation. Wilson and the Cabinet read the headlines of the day prior to the meeting and realized that, in order to satisfy Congressional and public outcry, some type of forceful action was necessary. More important, Wilson and the Cabinet also agreed that unless they immediately announced a plan, Congress would agree to a resolution calling for large armed intervention in the Mexican situation. An intervention of this magnitude would devastate Wilson's vision for Mexico, which he included in the *Annual Message on the State of the Union*, delivered to Congress three months earlier on 7 December 1915:

Our concern for the independence and prosperity of the states of Central and South America is not altered. . . . We still mean always to make a common cause of national independence and of political liberty in America. But that purpose is now better understood so far as it concerns ourselves. It is not known to be a selfish purpose. It is known to have in it no thought of taking advantage of any government in this hemisphere or playing its political fortunes for our own

benefit. All the governments of America stand, so far as we are concerned, upon a footing of genuine equality and unquestioned independence.

We have been put to the test in Mexico, and we have stood the test. Whether we have benefited Mexico by the course we have pursued remains to be seen. Her fortunes are in her own hands. But we have at least proved that we will not take advantage of her in her distress and undertake to impose upon her an order and government of our own choosing. . . . We have unhesitatingly applied that heroic principle to the case of Mexico, and now hopefully await the rebirth of the troubled Republic, which has had so much of which to purge itself and so little sympathy from any outside quarter in the radical but necessary process. We will aid and befriend Mexico, but we will not coerce her; and our course with regard to her ought to be sufficient proof to all Americans that we seek no political suzerainty or selfish control.²⁴

Wilson and the Cabinet concurred that sending a relatively small force into Mexico with the singular mission to capture Villa was the best solution. They believed that a limited expedition focused on the capture and punishment of Villa would satisfy the public's appetite for revenge, while providing the best chance for avoiding war with Mexico, given the circumstances. There was concern that the situation could escalate into war if Carranza refused to allow the expedition to operate in Mexico, but that risk was deemed acceptable, and Wilson made the decision to authorize a Punitive Expedition to go after Villa and his men.²⁵ Immediately following the cabinet meeting, the White House issued the first Press Release since the raid on Columbus:

An adequate force will be sent at once in pursuit of Villa with the single object of capturing him and putting a stop to his forays. This can and will be done in entirely friendly aid of the constituted authorities in Mexico and with scrupulous respect for the sovereignty of that Republic.²⁶

Secretary Baker, who had been on the job scarcely twenty-four hours, hurriedly returned to the War Department to deliver the President's decision.

When Baker arrived at the War Department, he approached Chief of Staff Scott and said, "I want you to start an expedition into Mexico to catch Villa." This alarmed Scott, who asked: "Mr. Secretary, do you want the United States to make war on one man? Suppose he should get on a train and go to Guatemala, Yucatan, or South America; are you going to go after him?" The Secretary replied "Well, no, I am not." Scott suggested "That is not what you want then. You want his *band* captured or destroyed." Baker finished the conversation with "Yes, that is what I really want."²⁷

As a result of the morning cabinet meeting and the conversation between Baker and Scott concerning the scope of mission, the first guidance to the field was sent to the Southern Department Commander, Major General Frederick Funston, who had been requesting additional orders since the attack. Baker had listened carefully to Scott's advice but did not omit reference to Villa in the warning order, which read:

President has directed that an armed force be sent into Mexico with the sole object of capturing Villa and preventing any further raids by his band and with scrupulous regard for the sovereignty of Mexico. Secretary of War directs you telegraph exactly what you need to carry out foregoing general instructions but you will not take any overt steps until receipt orders from War Department.²⁸

The staff spent the rest of the day preparing orders for the Punitive Expedition, but without significant assistance from the War College Division.

At the request of Army Chief of Staff Scott, the chief of the plans division Brigadier General M. M. Macomb was summoned to the War Department on 10 March to help draft plans for a possible punitive expedition. He generally refused to cooperate. Earlier in the day, Macomb had drafted and signed a memorandum in which he tried to relinquish formally any involvement in the planning for a limited operation in Mexico. His justification was that the war plans his division were responsible for "refer to larger

problems, such as intervention in Mexico or some state thereof,” and that “in any case a war plan does not cover the movement of tactical units. . . . In this case, the Commanding General, Southern Department, should be instructed as to what the administration desires.” Neither Macomb nor his staff at the War College Division wanted any responsibility for the expedition, and they were trying to distance themselves from an operation they thought would fail. This memorandum received backing from Scott’s Assistant Chief of Staff, Tasker Bliss. Consequentially, the orders drafted for the Punitive Expedition did not include the input from the nation’s primary military planners.²⁹

At approximately 6:30 on the evening of 10 March, Baker returned to the White House seeking approval of the orders drafted by the General Staff. Of note, there was no mention of Villa by name in the directive. The packet for the President contained a cover letter and four enclosures, one of which included the skepticism of the General Staff. This enclosure contained several worries regarding a manhunt for Villa. Foremost among these was “The extent and character of the country in which Villa is free to operate, the strong likelihood is that the dispersion of his force will rather result in his taking refuge in inaccessible mountain hiding places and so requiring prolonged operations for his ultimate capture.”³⁰ Also included in the enclosure was a recommendation from the General Staff that the Southern Department be allowed to use all its available forces to march into Mexico with the intent to establish a security buffer zone between the two countries. This idea was not a new one. Since 1913, Assistant Chief of Staff Tasker Bliss, who had previously commanded the Southern Department, had been an advocate of a plan using 150,000 soldiers to prevent the raiding, sniping, and shelling of border towns in the event of increased hostilities between the two countries. Bliss believed it was

prudent to plan for the possibility that the current state of affairs could lead to a general war. He added, “we be prepared for every available military contingency; and that, first of all, we be prepared to take military possession of Mexican territory immediate opposite all American towns as being the only way in which we can guarantee the protection of the latter.”³¹ Furthermore, the staff requested that standing orders be issued to commanders in the field that, in the event of further attacks or raids from Mexico, they be allowed to pursue the “bands from Mexico as far as their strength and resources will permit in each case, with a view of securing from any recurrence of these outbreaks the maximum of advantage in capture and dispersion of the bands, and that these commanders be instructed in their subsequent activities to act without regard to the presence of the international border.”³² Neither of these recommendations were accepted, no doubt because they would have likely increased the possibility of war between the two countries. Having made this decision, Wilson approved the order before leaving with his wife to board the Presidential Yacht, U.S.S. *Mayflower*, for a weekend of sailing on the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay.³³

The draft order directed that command of the Punitive Expedition be given to Brigadier General John J. Pershing, and not his superior, Major General Funston, who commanded the Army’s Southern Department. The by-name selection of an operational commander in a War Department order was unusual. In most cases, the regional department commander would either lead the operation personally, or appoint an officer under his purview. The selection of Pershing was mainly the result of Chief of Staff Scott’s influence. In his memoirs, Scott justifies the choice of Pershing. “As General Pershing was at El Paso near by,” Scott wrote, “the troops for the pursuit were being

taken from his command, I recommended that he be the one to go in charge of the punitive expedition, which Secretary Baker approved.”³⁴ Historian John S.D. Eisenhower offers a different interpretation of why Pershing was preferred by Scott. He writes, “as Scott was aware, command of the Punitive Expedition would call for restraint and tact at all times, and Pershing’s experience in the settlement of international disputes would make him the ideal agent to cooperate with the Carrancista forces. In diplomacy-- and even in common tact--Funston was seriously lacking.”³⁵ Baker, speaking to the Army War College in 1929, said “I had never met General Pershing, but they [Scott and Bliss] knew him and he was represented to be an officer who was absolutely loyal to the policy of the civil authorities under who he was serving.”³⁶ Regardless of the particular reasoning, the senior uniformed officers undoubtedly favored Pershing, and he would lead the expedition into Mexico.

There is no record of an objection by the Commander-in-Chief to the draft order presented by Baker, which was published promptly the next morning. The 11 March orders from the War Department read:

You will promptly organize an adequate military force of troops under the command of Brigadier General John J. Pershing and will direct him to proceed promptly across the border in pursuit of the Mexican band which attacked the town of Columbus and the troops there on the morning of the 9th instant. These troops will be withdrawn to American territory as soon as the de facto government in Mexico is able to relieve them of this work period. In any event, the work of these troops will be regarded as finished as soon as Villa’s band or bands are known to be broken up. In carrying out these instructions you are authorized to employ whatever guides and interpreters are necessary and you are given general authority to employ such transportation including motor transportation, with necessary civilian personnel as may be required.

You are instructed to make all practical use of the aeroplanes at San Antonio for observation. Telegraph for whatever reinforcements or material you need. Notify this office as to force selected and expedite movement.³⁷

Although the War Department issued orders to form the Punitive Expedition and expedite movement, there was not yet a diplomatic agreement with the Carranza government that would allow Pershing's forces to enter Mexico.

It was clear that Carranza would not sanction a Punitive Expedition to enter Mexico without additional assurances and negotiations. The State Department had undertaken an intense diplomatic effort, but to no avail. The Carranza government claimed it dispatched a force of 2,500 men to capture Villa, but that he crossed into U.S. territory to evade capture. Upon hearing that the United States was considering a major military operation to hunt down the Villistas, Carranza warned:

If the Government of the United States does not take into consideration the mutual permission for the American and Mexican forces to cross into the territory of one another in pursuit of bandits and insists in send an operating army into Mexican soil, my Government shall consider this act an invasion of national territory . . . It is inconceivable that the Government of the United States should resort to such means to capture Villa, as the only result would be to facilitate his impunity to leave the country and bring about a war between the two countries.⁸⁸

The issue of reciprocity for the purpose of hot pursuit had stalled the diplomatic effort. The Carranza government was seeking an agreement that would allow Mexican forces to cross into U.S. territory in pursuit of bandits as a concession for allowing the Punitive Expedition to operate in Mexico. A risk of entering into a standing agreement that would allow Carranza's forces to enter U.S. territory in hot pursuit was the possibility that the violence of the Mexican Revolution could spill into United States territory. If Pancho Villa and his men, for example, fled northern Mexico and infiltrated into the southwest American desert, the result could be a significant military action between two foreign forces waged on U.S. soil.

However, there were two key advantages to a reciprocity protocol. First, the agreement could be used as the legal pretext for the conduct of the Punitive Expedition. This could help alleviate any reservations from Central and South American republics that feared unilateral action from the United States without regard to the sovereignty of one of their neighbors. Second, it was believed that Carranza could use the accord as a domestic face-saving gesture, relieving pressure to attack a U.S. incursion on Mexican soil. It seemed hopeful that a diplomatic compromise over the issue could defuse the situation.

In the event diplomacy failed and an agreement with the United States was not reached, Carranza began to prepare Mexico for war. He sent orders to the generals in Sonora and Vera Cruz to prepare to oppose an American attack by land or sea.³⁹ The *La Opinión* newspaper issued an extra edition on 12 March containing a letter from Carranza in which he appealed, “be prepared for any emergency that may arise.” He was sure that if Mexico was plunged into a war with the United States, “the Mexican people will worthily perform their duty, no matter what the sacrifices they may have to undergo in the defense of their rights and sovereignty.”⁴⁰

It was clear to the War Department that the earnest activity observed in many Mexican garrisons were overt preparations for war with the United States. While the President was sailing the Chesapeake Bay aboard his yacht, Secretary Baker, acting on recommendations from Scott and the General Staff, ordered additional Regular Army cavalry and infantry regiments to protect the border towns of Arizona and New Mexico “from either invasion, or uprising of Mexican residents.” At the same time, Baker had denied a request, without prior consultation with Wilson, to call out the Organized Militia

of Arizona and New Mexico. Baker explained his decision in a wireless message sent to Wilson aboard the U.S.S. *Mayflower*. He believed that calling out the militia would “introduce a new phase to the situation,” and likely escalate tensions between the two countries.⁴¹

When the President returned to Washington on 13 March, he was concerned that an agreement with the Carranza Government had not been reached. He was also frustrated with the American press, whose newspapers were fanning the flames in support of a larger military intervention. To ensure everyone within his administration was acting with a singular purpose and to allay the fears of Mexico as to the intentions of the Punitive Expedition, Wilson sent the following message to Secretary of State Lansing on the afternoon of 13 March:

Here is the statement I suggested during our conversation this afternoon. I would be very much obliged if you would issue it at your ea[r]ly convenience. Will you not be kind enough to communicate this immediately to the Secretary of War. In order to remove any apprehensions that may exist either in the United States or in Mexico, the President has authorized me to give in his name the public assurance that the military operations now in contemplation by this Government will be scrupulously confined to the object already announced, and that in no circumstances will they be suffered to trench in any degree upon the sovereignty of Mexico or develop into intervention of any kind in the internal affairs of our sister Republic. On the contrary, what is now being done is deliberately intended to preclude the possibility of intervention.⁴²

Lansing and Baker immediately disseminated this information. Lansing cabled the de facto government in Mexico City and his diplomats involved in the crisis, while Baker promptly telegraphed the Southern Department, echoing the views of Wilson when he telegraphed:

The President desires that your attention be especially and earnestly called to his determination that the expedition into Mexico is limited to the purposes originally stated, namely the pursuit and dispersion of the band or bands that attacked

Columbus. It is of the highest importance that no color of any other possibility or intention be given and therefore while the President desires the force to be adequate to disperse the bands in question and to protect communications, neither in size nor otherwise should the expedition afford the slightest ground of suspicion of any other or larger object.⁴³

Neither message identified Villa by name, however the “object already announced” clearly defines punishing Villa as the purpose of the expedition. Similarly to the initial Press Release from the White House, Lansing’s 10 March telegram to all American Consular Offices in Mexico expressly stated, “An adequate force will be sent at once in pursuit of Villa with the single object of capturing him and putting a stop to his forays.”⁴⁴ Carranza’s letter in *La Opinión* acknowledged, “I know that forces of the United States are being mobilized . . . for the purpose, according to President Wilson’s declarations . . . to pursue and try to capture Villa.”⁴⁵ Other Department of State messages included reference to the immediate pursuit and capture of Villa as the definitive reason for the expedition. On 14 March, a second telegram was circulated to all consular officers emphasizing, “This government’s expedition will shortly enter Mexico with sole object of pursuing and capturing Villa and his band.”⁴⁶ In contrast, the War Department was extremely careful in not mentioning Villa by name, the only exception being the initial warning order sent out of the headquarters immediately following the raid on Columbus.

The important distinction of whether or not capturing Pancho Villa was the primary goal of the expedition would have a major impact on the operation. It is unlikely that the omission of Villa’s name in all but one of the War Department’s documents was anything but deliberate. The senior officers of the General Staff and War College Division, many with years of experience pursuing American Indian and Philippine

leaders, recognized the pitfalls of a policy that focused on individuals. The General Staff believed that, even if the Punitive Expedition was successful at capturing Villa and the men responsible for the attack on Columbus, this would accomplish little in stabilizing the border region and reducing the threat to American citizens and their property, which was the larger issue that needed to be addressed.⁴⁷

On 13 March, Secretary of State Lansing responded to the Mexican government's offer of due reciprocity, accepting the premise that each country now had permission to cross over the international boundary in pursuit of brigands and marauders. Lansing sent a lengthy communiqué to the Mexican Foreign Secretary, stating in the third paragraph: "The Government of the United States understands that in view of its agreement to this reciprocal arrangement proposed by the de facto Government the arrangement is now complete and in force and the reciprocal privileges thereunder may accordingly be exercised by either Government without further interchange of views."⁴⁸ Lansing received a reply within three hours. It was very good news. The Mexican Foreign Secretary responded: "I am pleased to receive a reply of this character from the Government of the United States. It will relieve the very delicate situation that has developed owing to the Columbus affair."⁴⁹

The State Department interpreted the preceding traffic to mean that the United States now had consent from the Carranza government for the Punitive Expedition to enter Mexico and hunt down Villa and that war had been averted. However, the diplomatic maneuvering was not complete. Although both sides agreed in principle to hot pursuit across the international border, detailed negotiations resulting in a formal protocol continued for another three weeks. During that time, there was a large amount of

diplomatic wrangling about whether or not the agreement reached by the two countries was applicable for a response to the raid on Columbus, or only to future raids of the same type. Additionally, the depth and duration of the operating zone for future pursuits was negotiated in detail. The United States offered a draft fifteen-article agreement on 19 March, and the Carranza government counter offered a ten-article draft on 27 March. The ten-article draft read:

Article 1. It is agreed that the regular Government forces of the two Republics may reciprocally cross the part of the boundary line comprised between the Colorado River and Piedras Negras, and within a zone of sixty kilometers in either country counted from the said line with the object of pursuing bands of armed men that may have entered from one country into the other, committed outrages on foreign territory and escaped across the boundary line.

Article 2. The reciprocal crossing agreed to in Article 1 shall only take place in comparatively uninhabited or unprotected parts of the territory on either side of the boundary line and in no case at a distance less than ten kilometers from any cantonment or city in the territory in which the pursuit is conducted, unless the cantonment or city be situated in a mountainous district wherein communication is difficult.

Article 3. The commander of the forces crossing the frontier under the terms of this agreement will, at the moment of crossing or before, if possible, give notice of his proposed movement and of the number of troops in his command to the nearest commanding officer or the civilian authorities of the country whose territory he is about to enter.

Article 4. The Government of the country in which the pursuit takes place will cooperate by every means with the pursuing force to the end that the lawless bands be speedily captured or exterminated.

Article 5. The pursuing force will retire to its own territory as soon as it shall have overtaken and overcome within the zone the lawless bands being dealt with. In no case shall the pursuing force establish itself or remain on foreign territory for more than fifteen days, unless by special agreement between the two Governments or at the solicitation of the local authorities of that territory.

Article 6. No pursuit shall be undertaken on the territory of the other country unless begun within three days after the flight of the lawless band across the boundary line.

Article 7. Under no pretext or consideration whatever shall the pursuing forces of either country occupy cities or cantonments situated in the country in which the pursuit is conducted in accordance with the terms of this agreement.

Article 8. All abuses committed by the pursuing forces shall be published by the government to which they belong according to the gravity of the offence.

The persons directly responsible for such abuses shall be withdrawn from the frontier and indemnities shall be promptly given to all those who may have suffered injury.

Article 9. Should the inhabitants of one country commit outrages on the foreign pursuing forces, the Government of the country where the outrages were committed will be responsible to the Government of the other country only in case of denial of justice and refusal to punish the guilty persons.

Article 10. This agreement will go into effect upon the date of signature and will remain in force until one of the parties shall have given the other in advance two months' written notice of its intention to terminate the agreement.⁵⁰

The diplomatic dance over the fine points of an agreement continued until 3 April, when Secretary of State Lansing ultimately accepted almost all of the Mexican version of the protocol "on the understanding that the conditions imposed by that agreement are not to be applied to the forces of the United States now in Mexico in pursuit of Villa and his bandits."⁵¹

On 14 March, with the crisis between Washington and Mexico City now temporarily defused, and the Punitive Expedition apparently cleared to enter Mexico by Carranza, it was seemingly time to get the operation underway. However, before the expedition could begin the pursuit, it faced one last hurdle. As Pershing began final preparations to cross the border, a local Mexican commander stated that he would oppose the American troops entering Mexico, unless he received specific instructions from General Carranza allowing them to pass uninterrupted.⁵² The report of possible Mexican resistance caused renewed anxiety in Washington.

President Wilson and Secretary Baker met at length on the night of 14 March to discuss the latest situation. Wilson directed that two actions take place. First, Baker was to ensure that Pershing understood he was not to cross the international border until it was clear that Mexican forces would allow the Punitive Expedition to proceed

unopposed.⁵³ Second, Wilson directed Baker to draft a set of detailed instructions that would constrain the expedition's actions, in an attempt to limit the chance of war between the two countries. This meeting illustrated Wilson's willingness to place strict operating procedures and limitations on the Punitive Expedition. As a result of the late-night conference, Baker issued the following instructions, marked urgent, and requested personal acknowledgement from both Funston and Pershing:

In the view of the great distance between the seat of Government and the forces in the field, the President regards it as of the utmost importance that General Funston and all officers in command of troops of the United States clearly understand the exact nature of the expedition of our forces into Mexico, and he therefore directs obedience in letter and in spirit to the following orders:

ONE. If any organized body of troops of the de facto Government of the Republic of Mexico are met, they are to be treated with courtesy and their cooperation welcomed, if they desire to cooperate in the objects of the expedition.

TWO. Upon no account or pretext, and neither by act, word, or attitude of any American soldier, shall this expedition become or be given the appearance of being hostile to the integrity or dignity of the Republic of Mexico, by the courtesy of which this expedition is permitted to pursue an aggressor upon the peace of these neighboring Republics.

THREE. Should the attitude of any organized body of troops of the de facto Government of Mexico appear menacing, commanders of the forces of the United States are, of course, authorized to place themselves and their commands in proper situation of defense, *and if actually attacked they will of course defend themselves by all means at their command*, but in no event must they attack or become the aggressor with any such body of troops.

FOUR. Care is to be taken to have in a state of readiness at all times the means of rapid communication from the front to the headquarters of the General commanding the Department, and, through him, to the War Department in Washington; and any evidence of misunderstanding on the part of officials, military or civil, of the de facto Government of Mexico as to the objects, purposes, character or acts of the expedition of the United States, are to be reported to the Department with the utmost expedition, with a view to having them taken up directly with the Government of Mexico through the Department of State.

The first draft of these strict guidelines made Scott and Bliss uncomfortable, both generals believing that “the text of the dispatch might, by any possibility, be regarded as tying the hands of our commanders in Mexico in the necessities of emergency situations which might arise.” The two men lobbied Baker successfully to have included in the text the leeway “and if actually attacked they will of course defend themselves by all means at their command.”⁵⁴ This was the final directive issued to the Punitive Expedition prior the crossing into Mexico the next morning.

After a series of last minute diplomatic reassurances, on 15 March the Punitive Expedition entered Mexico unopposed by Carranza’s forces, although no formal agreement had yet been signed between the two governments on the issue of reciprocal pursuit. Pershing’s forces organized into a number of “flying columns” of cavalymen, who scoured the area searching for Villa and his men. Regrettably for the Punitive Expedition, Villa now had a six-day head start on the Americans, and the search for Villa would now require covering hundreds of square miles.

Two days after crossing the border in pursuit of Villa, Congress gave its support for the operation. On 17 March the 64th Congress passed Concurrent Resolution Number 17, approving “the use of the armed forces of the United States for the sole purpose of apprehending and punishing the lawless bands of armed men who . . . committed outrages on American soil, and fled into Mexico.” In its entirety, the resolution was a resounding endorsement of the President’s policy, and it was clear that eight days after the Columbus attack, Congressional moderates had prevailed. A declaration for intervention or war had been avoided. The deliberate phrasing of the congressional language emphasized that “such military expedition shall not be permitted to encroach in

any degree upon the sovereignty of Mexico or to interfere in any manner with the domestic affairs of the Mexican people.”⁵⁵ However, these words gave little comfort to the Mexican officials, and had no appreciable influence on the still tense situation.



Figure1. Source: John S.D. Eisenhower, *Intervention: The United States and The Mexican Revolution, 1913-1917* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 244.

Diplomatic troubles continued as evidently nobody from the government of the United States informed Mexican officials when the Punitive Expedition crossed the international border or took the time to provide updates on the whereabouts of the operational forces as the mission advanced into Mexican territory. The failure to provide timely information on the progress of the expedition was likely deliberate for two main reasons. First, as a matter of operational security, the War Department was understandably reluctant to share the exact composition, location, and activities of American forces. The diplomats at the State Department forwarded to Scott a request for information from the Mexican government for the American troops “number, the branch of the service to which they belong, the name of the officer in command, the place where they are.”⁵⁶ Scott balked at providing specific information that could be of value to the Carranza’s forces if the situation escalated and Pershing’s men found themselves fighting for survival in Mexico. Second, Villa reportedly had an extensive indigenous intelligence network, and any chances for capturing him would have to rely on the stealth and surprise of the U.S. cavalymen. Prudently, it was necessary to assume that Villa had contact with supporters who would be privy to any information passed to Mexican authorities. Regardless, the failure to disclose the current situation of U.S. forces in Mexico, in addition to other circumstances, contributed to renewed tensions between the two governments.

The further the Punitive Expedition marched into Mexico, the more tense relationships became between Washington and Mexico City. Carranza’s initial policy of allowing the Punitive Expedition to enter Mexico, but under official protest, was becoming more untenable as the Americans pushed south.⁵⁷ His perceived acquiescence

to the Americans was becoming increasingly unpopular even among Carranza's own generals, and the possibility existed that his position could lead to his political downfall.⁵⁸ The certainty of General Bliss, General Macomb, and the War College Division planners that war between the two countries was inevitable once American forces entered Mexico looked more prophetic each passing day. The first deadly crisis surrounding the Punitive Expedition between Mexico and the United States was only days away.

¹Johnson, *The Punitive Expedition*, 36.

²“The Columbus Raid,” *U.S. Cavalry Journal*, 114 (April 1917): 490-96.

³Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 185.

⁴Department of State, *Foreign Relations*, 480.

⁵William Gardner Bell, *Secretaries of War and Secretaries of the Army*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1992), 110-11.

⁶Arthur S. Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 36, *January – May 1916* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 251.

⁷Frederick Palmer, *Newton D. Baker: America at War*, vol. 1, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1931), 8-9.

⁸C. H. Cramer, *Newton D. Baker, A Biography* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1961), 64.

⁹Cramer, *Newton D. Baker*, 81.

¹⁰Hugh Scott, *Some Memories of a Solider*, 519.

¹¹“To Supress Villa” *New York Times*, 11 March 1916, 10.

¹²*New York Times*, 10 March 10, 1916. Under the heading “Views of the Local Press,” the *New York Times* published several excerpts from area papers, including the two quoted in this work.

- ¹³Johnson, *The Punitive Expedition*, 165-66.
- ¹⁴“Fall Prepares Senate Resolution Looking for Intervention” *New York Times*, 10 March 1916, 3.
- ¹⁵“Congress Backs pursuit of Villa” *New York Times*, 11 March 1916, 3.
- ¹⁶Johnson, *The Punitive Expedition*, 168.
- ¹⁷Link, *Wilson Papers*, vol. 36, 276-79.
- ¹⁸Link, *Confusions and Crises*, 207.
- ¹⁹“Plans for Bigger Campaign” *New York Times*, 11 March 1916, 1.
- ²⁰U.S. War Department, *Annual Report of the Chief of Staff, 1917* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918), 134.
- ²¹Frederick Palmer, *Bliss, Peacemaker: The Life and Letters of General Tasker Howard Bliss* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1934), 124.
- ²²Calhoun, *Power and Principle*, 53.
- ²³Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1916*, 486.
- ²⁴Arthur S Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 35, *October 1, 1915 – January 27, 1916* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 293-96.
- ²⁵Link, *Confusions and Crises*, 207-8.
- ²⁶Link, *Wilson Papers*, vol. 36, 287.
- ²⁷Scott, *Some Memories of a Solider*, 519-20.
- ²⁸Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1916*, 483.
- ²⁹Calhoun, *Power and Principle*, 54.
- ³⁰Link, *Wilson Papers*, vol. 36, 286.
- ³¹Calhoun, *Power and Principle*, 56.
- ³²Link, *Wilson Papers*, vol. 36, 287.
- ³³“President Goes on Weekend Trip” *New York Times*, 11 March 1916, page 1.

³⁴Scott, *Some Memories of a Solider*, 521.

³⁵Eisenhower, *Intervention!*, 235.

³⁶Donald Smythe, *Guerrilla Warrior: The Early Life of John J. Pershing* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 220-21.

³⁷John J. Pershing, *Report by Major General John J. Pershing, Commanding, of the Punitive Expedition* (Colonia Dublan: Headquarters, Punitive Expedition, 1916), 3.

³⁸Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1916*, 483.

³⁹Link, *Confusions and Crises*, 210.

⁴⁰Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1916*, 487.

⁴¹Link, *Wilson Papers*, vol. 36, 295-96.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 298.

⁴³*Ibid.*, Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1916*, 489.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 484.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 487.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 490.

⁴⁷Calhoun, *Power and Principle*. The author goes to great lengths to illustrate the views of the War College Division and the General Staff concerning Mexico. His chapter entitled "The Power of Civilian Control: Mexico" provides numerous illustrations of the Army's position that a invasion and pacification campaign would be required ultimately to secure the border region.

⁴⁸Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1916*, 488.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 502.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 507.

⁵²Pershing, *Report of the Punitive Expedition*, 7.

⁵³Link, *Confusions and Crises*, 213.

⁵⁴Link, *Wilson Papers*, vol. 36, 322-24.

⁵⁵Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1916*, 491-92.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 497-99.

⁵⁷Link, *Confusions and Crises*, 218, 280-81.

⁵⁸Stout, *Border Conflict*, 57.

CHAPTER 3

CRISIS, MOBILIZATION, AND THE END OF THE PUNITIVE EXPEDITION

After crossing the border on 16 March 1916, the pursuit of those responsible for the raid on Columbus began in earnest. The American troopers, in an incredible feat of endurance, rapidly closed the distance between themselves and Villa, stopping only as absolutely necessary to care for their horses.¹ There were numerous reports that Villa was located in a desolate area west of the city of Chihuahua, somewhere in the Sierra Madre mountains. Pershing was confident the reports were accurate, and he issued instructions for the search to focus on this area.

Within two weeks of entering Mexico, the Punitive Expedition had covered hundreds of square miles in search of Villa and nearly succeeded in capturing him. On the morning of 29 March, one of Pershing's flying columns of cavalrymen, led by Colonel George Dodd, charged into the village of Guerrero, acting on a report that Villa and over two hundred of his fighters were in town. Villa, who was suffering from an accidental gunshot in the leg by one of his men, narrowly escaped capture.² Although the Punitive Expedition would remain in Mexico another tens months, the assault on Guerrero would be the closest the troopers came to killing or capturing Villa. The next time American forces were involved in heavy fighting it was not against Villa's men, but with Mexican soldiers.

On 12 April, a column of approximately 140 cavalrymen led by Major Frank Tompkins rode into the town of Parral, a distance of 516 miles from the border with the United States. This would mark the farthest penetration of the Punitive Expedition into

Mexico.³ A hostile crowd shouting “Viva Villa” and “Viva Mexico” and throwing stones confronted the Americans. As the cavalry withdrew from the town as a result of the protest, Mexican soldiers from the local garrison fired on Tompkins’s men.⁴ This began a significant battle between the American cavalry and Mexican garrison forces that lasted for several hours. During the battle, approximately forty Mexicans were killed, while U.S. losses were two killed and six wounded.⁵ The fighting at Parral effectively ended the pursuit of Villa and his men, while precipitating a crisis that placed the two countries once again on the brink of war. Parral was the first in a series of events that would eventually lead to the full-scale mobilization of the United States military.

Reports of the combat at Parral reached Washington by diplomatic message traffic initiated by the Mexican government, and it was clear from the outset of the crisis that both governments were initially prepared to go to great lengths to avoid a general war. The first messages between the two countries illustrated the willingness to keep the situation from spinning out of control. The Carranza government informed the U.S. Department of State of the fighting almost immediately, stressing in a honest attempt to defuse the situation that “the Mexican government laments what has occurred, which it could not prevent, and insists on the American Government’s retiring its troops from our territory, so that no motive may exist for altering the good and cordial relationships which both countries are pledged to preserve.”⁶ In response, Secretary of State Lansing wired that “the intention of this Government is the same as it was at the outbreak when United States troops entered Mexico; that is, to endeavor to take the bandit chief, Villa. It desires to repeat again to the de facto government that it has no intention to violate in any way the sovereignty of Mexico.” Lansing’s message also stressed that the quickest way to

facilitate an American withdrawal was by the mutual cooperation between the two militaries with the common goal of capturing Villa. Nowhere in his letter does the secretary attempt to place blame or demand retribution for what happened at Parral.⁷ Additionally, in a further attempt to defuse the situation, the Secretary wrote to all American Consuls in Mexico that the “Department learns that Carranza authorities deported themselves admirably in calming the people of Parral and in preventing further attacks on the American forces.”⁸ This spate of traffic began to set the stage for negotiations aimed at the removal of the Punitive Expedition from Mexico, which was a suggestion that was acquiring important support in Washington.

The idea of withdrawing the Punitive Expedition, regardless of the capture of Villa, was gaining momentum even before the fighting at Parral. As early as 8 April, General Scott wrote, “I do not know how long this thing is going to continue. It seems to me that Pershing has accomplished about all he was sent for. . . . It does not seem dignified for all the United States to be hunting for one man in a foreign country. . . . If the things were reversed, we would not allow any foreign army to be sloshing around in our country 300 miles from the border, no matter who they were.”⁹ Secretary of War Baker concurred with Scott that Pershing had accomplished his mission. On 11 March the War Department stated, “In any even the work of these troops will be regarded as finished as soon as Villa’s band or bands are known to be broken up.”¹⁰ Baker, in concert with his Chief of Staff, emphasized to presidential confidant Colonel Edward House that it was “foolish to chase a single bandit all over Mexico.”¹¹ The recommendation by both Baker and Scott that the Punitive Expedition should be withdrawn was justifiable. According to the specific wording of the orders establishing the venture, Pershing had done what was

expected. Colonel Dodd's report of the fighting at Guerrero that was forwarded to the War Department summarized by saying that "with Villa probably permanently disabled, Lopez seriously wounded and Hernandez dead and the blow administered this morning, the Villistas party would seem to be pretty well disintegrated." General Pershing wrote in his report that "after the fight at Guerrero the detachments of Villa's command scattered to the four winds."¹²

In addition to the strongly held view by Baker and Scott that the Punitive Expedition had accomplished its mission, the *Sussex* crisis with Germany posed a grave strategic challenge to the War Department. There was a very real possibility during April 1916 that the United States would soon find itself at war with both the Mexico and Germany. The German government had begun a campaign of aggressive submarine warfare in European coastal waters during March 1916, and on 24 March, the steamer *Sussex* was torpedoed in the English Channel with twenty-five Americans on board. The attack on the *Sussex* led Germany and the United States to the brink of war, a possibility for which the United States was not prepared, given that most of its Regular Army was running itself ragged in the mountains of western Chihuahua in pursuit of Villa.¹³ The critical European situation, coupled with the Punitive Expedition's success at Guerrero, gave strength to the War Department's argument that it was time to withdraw Pershing's forces in Mexico.

The Cabinet met on several occasions during the second week of April, prior to Parral, to discuss the feasibility of recommending to the President a withdrawal of the Punitive Expedition. Secretary of War Baker, Postmaster General Albert Burleson, and Secretary of State Lansing supported a withdrawal. Secretary of Agriculture David

Houston, Attorney General Thomas Gregory, and Secretary of Interior Franklin Lane opposed ending the expedition as long as Villa remained at large. Secretary Lane, with an eye on the upcoming presidential election, argued that Wilson would look weak if he ordered an end to the expedition before Villa was personally punished for the outrage at Columbus. The battle at Parral, despite the assessment of the War Department, changed the dynamics of the situation in favor of those who argued for a continued presence in Mexico. After the combat between Mexican and American forces, any move by Wilson to order the Punitive Expedition back to the United States before finding Villa would be seen as yielding to Mexican pressure, and this was deemed politically unacceptable. The historian Robert Bruce Johnson described the state of affairs when he wrote, "Pershing would stay, no matter what reasons might argue for withdrawal; there was no other honorable course to follow under the circumstances."¹⁴ With an immediate removal of the expedition no longer a possibility, and future clashes between U.S. and Mexican forces likely, Scott prudently recommended to Wilson that the Organized Militia be called out and placed along the border as a precaution. These additional forces could be used for reinforcing or extricating Pershing in Mexico in the event of war, while also providing sorely needed increased security along the border. The President, fearful that a show of force along the border would provoke the Mexicans, disapproved the request for mobilization, much to the chagrin of Scott.¹⁵

Secretary Baker and Chief of Staff Scott felt the sober reality of the situation. The Punitive Expedition was now spread out over hundreds of miles deep into what was rapidly becoming hostile territory and surrounded by thousands of potential enemies. It was unclear whether or not Carranza's soldiers would attempt to push the expedition

forcibly back into the United States, but there was reason to fear the worst. There were disturbing messages arriving in Washington. The American consular in Chihuahua telegraphed, "Am convinced there is a widespread plan to force immediate withdrawal American troops."¹⁶ Brigadier General George Bell at Fort Sam Houston forwarded an intercepted instruction from the Mexican Secretary of War to his field commanders, which read, "In case of intervention you will destroy all rail connections between U.S.A. and Mexico in your district and at present allow only necessary locomotives at border points, idle locomotives to be held in reserve at interior points."¹⁷ The situation was indeed grim.

On 17 April, Pershing sent an alarming assessment of the situation explaining, "At first people exhibited only passive disapproval American entry into country. Lately sentiment has changed to hostile position. The movement of Government troops through Sonora towards our line of communication must be regarded with grave suspicion. Recent outbreak in Parral against troops undoubtedly premeditated. Believe this generally represents the attitudes of both Carranza and Villistas. Little difference between them." Included in this message was the recommendation, "In order to prosecute our mission with any promise of success it is therefore absolutely necessary for us to assume complete possession for time being of country through which we must operate. . . . Therefore recommend immediate capture by this command of city and state of Chihuahua also the seizure all of railroads therein as preliminary to further necessary."¹⁸

Pershing, still incensed from the attack at Parral, let emotions get the best of him when he handed a copy of this telegram to a group of reporters accompanying the expedition. A few days later the most scathing portions of the Pershing's message were

published under the front-page headlines “Pershing Halts; Never was Aided by the Mexicans” and “Censor Permits Times Correspondent at Front to Tell of Carranza Opposition.”¹⁹ It seemed as though the selection of Pershing as the commander of the Punitive Expedition by Scott may have been a bad choice. The language of Pershing’s message showed a man succumbing to the stress of the operation. The general had clearly lost his temper following Parral, and given the volatility of the situation, any irrational act by the expedition’s commander could certainly begin a war with Mexico. According to historian Arthur Link, the President was so disturbed by the tone of the message and Pershing’s recommendations that he immediately dispatched “the wise and cautious General Scott” to confer with General Frederick Funston at Fort Sam Houston.²⁰ Scott immediately departed for Texas, arriving at Southern Department Headquarters with guidance from Secretary Baker to discuss with Funston “the theory of this expedition as being different from either war against or intervention in Mexico” and to develop recommendations to reduce tensions and avoid war.²¹ This trip to the border would mark the beginning of Scott’s most important contribution during the Punitive Expedition to resolving the crisis between the United States and Mexico.

After arriving at the Southern Department Headquarters and conferring at length about the situation with Funston, Scott sent an assessment of the situation and his consequent recommendations to Washington. His message detailed three possible courses of actions. The first option was to order Pershing to resume the active search for Villa, regardless of Mexican opposition, and to seize the railways necessary to reinforce his command with additional forces to ensure the expedition’s freedom of action. The second course was for Pershing to concentrate forces near the town of Colonia Dublan where

substantial rations and forage were available. From this relatively secure location the troops could be maintained indefinitely as an incentive for Carranza's forces to kill or capture Villa. The third alternative was to remove the Punitive Expedition from Mexico and end the hunt for Villa and those responsible for the raid on Columbus. Scott and Funston recommended the second course of action coupled with the seizure of Mexican North Western Railroad from Juarez to Casas Grandes to facilitate resupply of Pershing's consolidated forces.²²

Wilson agreed with Scott's recommendation for the second course of action and, in a display of confidence in the Chief of Staff, promptly approved it on 23 April, with the exception of "no present seizure of the railroad."²³ The President then took advantage of Scott's presence on the border to promote a high-level conference between Mexican and U.S. generals, in a hope that a face-to-face meeting between military leaders would "eliminate misunderstandings and make possible real cooperation between the two governments."²⁴ Carranza, who was also trying to avoid war, embraced the idea and offered one of his closest allies and most powerful officers, General Alvaro Obregón, to represent Mexican authorities at the talks. Preparations for the conference began immediately, and the first meeting was scheduled for 30 April.

Scott, accompanied by Funston, received his written guidance on 26 April while traveling to the proposed meeting site. Wilson personally typed the lengthy talking points and detailed instructions for Scott on his Oval Office typewriter.²⁵ He wrote:

You will meet General Obregon and discuss with him the future military operations of our forces in Mexico on the following basis: The Government of the United States earnestly desires to avoid anything which has the appearance of intervention in the domestic affairs of the Republic of Mexico. It desires to cooperate with the de facto Government of that Republic, and its pursuit of the

bandit Villa and his bands is for the sole purpose of removing a menace to the common security and the friendly relations of the two Republics. So long as he remains at large and is able to mislead numbers of his fellow citizens into attacks like that at Columbus, the danger exists of American public opinion being irritated to the point of requiring general intervention. For, of course, depredations on American soil and the loss of lives of American citizens cannot be tolerated, and one other such experience would make it difficult to restrain public opinion here. The Government of the United States realizes that the de facto Government of the Republic of Mexico is equally anxious to avoid occasions of conflict and misunderstanding. It likewise realizes that public opinion in the Republic of Mexico must be taken into consideration. It, therefore, has instructed its military commanders to observe the most considerate sense of all the proprieties, to recognize in every way the dignity of the Republic of Mexico and its de facto Government, and to proceed with its operations harmonious cooperation with the military forces of Mexico towards an object which is, of course, of common concern and of even greater importance to the Government of Mexico than to that of the United States, since the major portion of the depredations and lawlessness committed by the bandit Villa is upon Mexican soil. Suggest to General Obregon that the presence of American troops in Mexico, if welcomed by Mexican authorities, can have no other appearance than that of friendly cooperation of two governments to suppress a cause of irritation to their common peace and their friendly relations. The American military commanders will respond instantly to all invitations for cooperation with forces of the Mexican Government. The Mexican Government has the means of locating more or less definitely the present whereabouts of Villa. Upon that fact being determined American military commanders will be glad to aid Mexican commanders in surrounding and capturing him and by such cordial cooperation the permanent friendly relations of the two governments would be demonstrated to their respective peoples. If it be deemed better American troops can be detained in the northern part of the State of Chihuahua while the forces of the Mexican Government drive Villa and his associates towards the north, in this way enabling the American troops to aid in his ultimate capture. The Government of the United States has no pride involved in who make the capture, and its only interest is that it should be done expeditiously so that American troops can be withdrawn and the peace of its borders assured. If General Obregon shows a spirit of cooperation, it should be met fully and generously.

If, on the other hand, his attitude should be a preemptory command for the immediate withdrawal of the American troops across the border, General Scott and General Funston should say that that question is a diplomatic question and should be worked out through the agency of the respective department of foreign affairs of the two republics. Generals Scott and Funston will, of course, treat with General Obregon on the basis of high military representatives of their respective governments and emphasize the friendly attitude of the Government of the United States toward the Government and people of Mexico, but will insist that so long as the possibility of further depredations by Villa exists the withdrawal of

American troops would increase the dangers and in any event be very difficult. It is possible that General Obregon may meet you with definitely stated objects on which alone he is authorized by the de facto government to confer with you. If so, the limitations thus imposed on the conference may result in embarrassment in reaching a thoroughly satisfactory conclusion. It is, therefore, desired that, without interfering with or delaying your conference with him you advise the Secretary of War and the Secretary of State at once on the bases presented by General Obregon for negotiations. This will enable further instructions to be promptly communicated to you. Meanwhile, in your conference, you will proceed with full powers to discuss and agree upon all points raised by either of the conferees which relate purely to the military situations including questions of lines of supply and use of railways. All doubtful matters, and all matters which evidently concern the Department of State, will be referred by you to Washington for instructions. It is assumed that General Obregon may follow this course with his own government in respect of matters on which he is not authorized to confer.²⁶

The first meeting on 30 April between Scott and Obregón was cordial, but failed to find any solution to the crisis. During the initial conversation, both men clearly stated the intentions and position of their respective governments. There was a major gulf between the two sides. The Mexicans insisted on the immediate withdrawal of the Punitive Expedition. Obregón justified his position by claiming that the Mexican government had reliable information that Villa was dead, and even if he was still alive, he no longer presented any threat to the border region. Of course, an immediate withdrawal of the force was unacceptable to the Americans, and according to Wilson's guidance, Scott did not have the authority to discuss this with the Mexican delegation anyway. Scott reiterated the U.S. position that the expedition would only begin withdrawing when it was clearly demonstrated that the Carranza government had secured the border region and was fully cooperating with Pershing's force.

After only a few hours, it was apparent that neither side was willing to move towards a major concession. Scott's point of view was that, "Obregón came here for one

thing to be discussed and we for another.”²⁷ Although neither side was willing to compromise at the end of the first day of deliberations, Scott and Obregón agreed to report to their respective capitals and, pending additional guidance, to continue discussions for a withdrawal of the Punitive Expedition. Wilson and Carranza quickly replied to their generals and instructed them to continue to try and find common ground from which to negotiate.²⁸ Scott also received a separate message from Secretary Baker at the War Department, advising that “We, of course, cannot foresee result of further conference with General Obregón but suggest that if deadlock seems imminent you adjourn for further instructions from Department so as to gain time to pull together outlying parts of General Pershing’s force. Every precaution should be taken against sudden or general attack.”²⁹ The War Department was very concerned about the vulnerability of the expedition and in self-interest supported the idea of continuing talks to allow Pershing to consolidate his dispersed cavalryman. Scott replied to Baker, “We feel certain deadlock will result. . . and we expect a flat ultimatum to get out of Mexico at once or take the consequences. . . . We feel that the border should be greatly strengthened at once to allow concentration of regular troops to meet expected eventualities in Mexico, repel invasion at many border points and cause Mexicans to feel that the United States is able and willing to repel attacks and we believe that if attacks can be prevented at all this prevention will be best accomplished by show of strength.”³⁰

A series of tedious negotiations continued as Scott and Obregón each tried to persuade the other to modify his position. On 2 May, a compromise agreement, mainly the effort of an untiring Scott, was reached after a lengthy twelve-hour private meeting between the two generals. Although clearly not perfect to either side, Scott and Obregón

forwarded the proposal to their governments for approval. The draft agreement contained three main points. First, the Constitutionalist Government would carry on a “vigorous pursuit” of the bandits that were still at large and augment their forces along the border to prevent “any disorders in Mexico that would in any way endanger American territorial officials.” Second, “the Government of the United States has decided to gradually withdraw the forces of the punitive expedition from Mexico, commencing the withdrawal immediately.” Third, the “Government of Mexico will make proper distribution of such its forces as may be necessary to prevent the possibility of invasion of American territory from Mexico.”³¹

Wilson wholeheartedly welcomed the text of the agreement and instructed Baker to prepare a formal statement to be released once word was received of Carranza’s acceptance. Anticipating a positive reply from the Mexicans, the draft announcement stated “this agreement happily provides for the cordial cooperation between the two governments” and “the ratification of this agreement by the two governments removes all controversy for their relations.”³² However, a response from the Mexicans was slow to arrive and Scott remained at the meeting site for another six days while awaiting official word from Carranza.

As the commitment of the Carranza government to find a peaceful solution to the crisis became increasingly suspect during the negotiations, and after two cross-border raids by Mexican marauders on 5 and 6 May killed four Americans near the towns of Glen Springs and Bouquillas, the War Department ordered the mobilization of the Organized Militia of the states of Texas, Arizona, New Mexico. A mobilization order for the approximately 4,500 militiamen had been prepared in advance on 1 May by the

General Staff based on Scott's assessment that more troops were needed "in order to give some added protection to border points exposed to raids." Baker signed the form on 9 May, which called-up the soldiers from the three states to federal duty for the purpose of protecting the border in the vicinity of San Antonio, Douglas, and Columbus.³³ The mobilization of these militiamen was the beginning of a massive build-up of American forces on the border, as war with Mexico once again became a possibility during most of May and June 1916.

On 8 May, the Mexican president surprisingly rejected the proposal "on the grounds that no date was set for complete withdrawal and therefore the agreement was too indefinite and a danger to Mexico."³⁴ For the next four days, the talks remained deadlocked over the issue of a timetable by which the Punitive Expedition would withdraw. The American position was that a specific timetable could not be published, as withdrawal was contingent on the proven capture or death of Villa and the reliability of the Carrancistas to maintain security in the border region. Obregón continued to repeat the original Mexican position, demanding that U.S. forces leave the country immediately. Not surprisingly, on 12 May the talks between Scott and Obregón ended in a stalemate over the timetable issue. Although the conference failed to reach a lasting agreement, the discussions did have the immediate impact of reducing tensions and averting a major war, at least for the time being. In a joint public statement, the generals emphasized "The ending of these conferences does not mean, in any way, the rupture of the good relations of friendship between the conferees nor between the respective Governments."³⁵

There had been ominous signs that another battle between U.S. and Mexican forces was imminent. On 22 May, Carranza's Secretary of Foreign Relations sent a

scathing 12,000-word message to Lansing, again demanding the immediate withdrawal of the Punitive Expedition. The letter chronicled the perceived wrongdoings that the Mexicans had suffered at the hands of the United States dating back to the initial penetration of the border by Pershing's forces in March 1916 without the prior consent of the Carranza government. The message had the tone and scope of an ultimatum, closing with "It is indispensable that this contradiction between the assurances of friendship on the part of Washington and the acts of suspicion and distrust and aggression on the part of the military authorities should disappear" and "these acts at the moment can not be other than the immediate withdrawal of the American troops which are to-day on Mexican territory."³⁶ Secretary Lansing, infuriated by the tone and content of the letter, wrote in the margins of his personal copy "Insulting" and "Makes the US a liar." According to Link, Lansing likely suggested to Wilson "it might be well to consider the advisability of returning the Note on account of its offensive tone."³⁷

The United States response to the "long and dangerous note" of 22 May was delayed almost a full month due to Wilson's and Lansing's preoccupation with the situation in Europe.³⁸ When finally issued on 20 June, the reply was forceful and blunt. Missing was the usual delicacy of diplomatic correspondence. Lansing began with, "I would be wanting in candor if I did not, before making answers to your allegations of facts and conclusions reached by your Government, express the surprise and regret which have been caused this Government by the discourteous tone and temper of this last communication of the *de facto* Government of Mexico." He continued, "It would tedious to recount instance after instance, outrage after outrage, atrocity after atrocity, to illustrate the true nature and extent of the widespread conditions of lawlessness and violence which

have prevailed.” He concluded by stating that the Punitive Expedition would not be withdrawn and that any attempt to remove the expedition forcibly from Mexico would lead to “the gravest of consequences” and, “While this government would deeply regret such a result, it cannot recede from its settled determination to maintain its national rights and to perform its full duty in preventing further invasions of the territory of the United States and in removing the peril which Americans along the international boundary have borne so long with patience and forbearance.”³⁹

It appeared that patience was running out, and both sides were taking additional steps to prepare for war. The War College Division, acting on orders from Scott, began updating plans on 16 June for the full-scale invasion of Mexico. Scott directed that the revised plan focus on the Mexican army as the key objective, and not the occupation of Mexico City, which was the ultimate goal of previous versions.⁴⁰ The change in focus to the Mexican army was a result of Wilson’s reluctance to occupy Mexico City on ideological grounds. Even in the event of national war, American forces would have limited objectives. The U.S. Army would be used to destroy the Mexicans forces attempting to forcibly remove the Punitive Expedition and not to march on Mexico City and establish an American proxy government. Scott also instructed that the updated plan provide “for the protection of the border, and an invasion on each of the lines of railway; a plan for taking over the railways as we go along, with personnel to manage them, repair gangs, bridge builders, etc.; the establishment of lines of communications; and the protection of American property in Mexico near the border that can be reached promptly.”⁴¹ In addition, the War Department ordered the immediate construction of a major military highway from Columbus to Namiquipa and, on 12 June, ordered an

additional 1,600 regulars to the border.⁴² The officers of the War College Division worked quickly and completed a new war plan based on Scott's guidance by 23 June.⁴³

The revised invasion plan called for the assembly of the National Guardsmen along the border, screened by the Regular Army. The main troop concentrations and preparations for the offensive would take place in three locations. The invasion force would be comprised of 30,000 soldiers assembled at Brownsville, 30,000 at El Paso, and 10,000 at Nogales. In addition, another 10,000 would reinforce Pershing, and 30,000 would be assigned border patrol duty. When the mobilization was complete and adequate forces were available, a feint would be made at Vera Cruz and Tampico with 10,000 soldiers transported by the Navy to draw the Mexican army to the south. Then the main thrusts, comprised of three axis of advance, would invade northern Mexico, destroy any resistance, and remain in place until a diplomatic settlement was reached.⁴⁴ Funston would command the eastern column forming at El Paso, Pershing would command the center column, and Brigadier General Sage would command the western column at Nogales. After being briefed on the war plans, Baker asked, "Who should command the whole?" Scott recommended Major General Leonard Wood, an outstanding officer and the senior major general on the Army rolls. Wilson and Baker believed the Chief of Staff was the best choice, and the President directed that Scott would have overall command of the invasion in the event of war with Mexico.⁴⁵

On the evening of 17 June, Wilson and Baker met at the White House to discuss the Mexican situation. It was during this meeting that the decision was made to mobilize fully the recently established National Guard, a power granted to the President as a result of the passage of the National Defense Act of 3 June. The orders for the mobilization of

over 140,000 National Guardsmen were published on 18 June. When the rolls were taken at the peak of mobilization on 31 August 1916, they would count 7,003 officers and 133,256 enlisted men in federal service, which when combined with the number of regular troops on active duty, led to the most men in U.S. uniform since the American Civil War.⁴⁶ In response to the mobilization of the U.S. National Guard, Carranza issued a call to arms for all able-bodied men to enlist in the Constitutionalist Army “for service against foreign invaders.”⁴⁷ The crisis continued to escalate. On June 20, Scott wrote, “It looks to me as if war will be on in a few days.”⁴⁸ The situation on the ground was also very tense, and some of the American soldiers in Mexico would soon be fighting for their lives.

Since the fighting at Parral, the hunt for Villa had, for the most part, become a secondary concern for the Punitive Expedition. The primary focus of the U.S. soldiers in Mexico since late April was defending against any future attacks by the Carrancistas and contingency planning for what to do in the event of general war. Pershing, acting on advice from Funston and the War Department, consolidated his forces near Colonia Dublan, which would remain the main operating base of the expedition until withdrawal from Mexico. The cavalrymen continued active patrolling to gain intelligence and conducted small raids against suspected Villistas locations, but by and large, the expedition became a fixed-base operation. On 16 June, the local Mexican commander in the region where the expedition was operating informed Pershing that “I have orders from my government to prevent, by the use of arms, new invasions of my country by American forces and also to prevent the American forces that are in this state from moving to the south, east or west of the places they now occupy. I communicate this to

you for your knowledge for the reason that your forces will be attacked by the Mexican forces if these indications are not heeded.” Pershing wrote back later the same day, “In reply you are informed that my government has placed no such restrictions upon the movements of American forces. I shall therefore use my own judgment as to when and in what direction I move my forces in pursuit of bandits or in seeking information regarding bandits. If under these circumstances the Mexican forces attack any of my columns the responsibility for the consequences will lie with the Mexican government.”⁴⁹ Within a week, the Mexican general would make good on his orders to resist movement of the Punitive Expedition in any direction but north.

On the morning of 21 June, two troops of U.S. cavalrymen under the command of Captain Charles T. Boyd approached the town of Carrizal on a scouting mission. Upon reaching the town, Boyd requested permission from the Mexican garrison commander to pass through. He was refused passage, and while in conference with the town’s Mexican officers, it was noticed that a large number of heavily armed Mexican troops were moving to a position on the flanks of Boyd’s men. Gunfire erupted and a general battle ensued. Nine Americans were killed, including Boyd. Another ten Americans were wounded and twenty-four captured by the Mexicans. The Mexicans lost thirty-nine men killed in action and a similar number wounded.⁵⁰ Boyd, who was known to have a quick temper, had been cautioned by Pershing to “not bring on a fight” and was clearly the aggressor in the incident.⁵¹ He could have easily led his men around the town and avoided a confrontation with the Mexican garrison. Historian Robert Bruce Johnson described Boyd as spoiling for a fight, quoting him as saying, “What I want is to go through that town, and we are not going to have a repetition of the Parral incident, if

every man of us is killed.”⁵² The young captain got the action he was looking for, lost his life in the process, and precipitated the gravest crisis between Mexico and the United States since Villa’s raid on Columbus.

The initial report of the battle at Carrizal arrived in Washington on the evening of 21 June. The War Department immediately issued orders to Funston to prepare for any eventuality and to be ready to seize all international bridges along the border without delay, but to take no action until receiving explicit orders from Washington.⁵³ Baker wrote Funston that “The Secretary of War desires you to act promptly to meet any emergency . . . with a view to preventing attack on American towns, supporting American forces, etc., but before undertaking execution of any general plans, send all information as to situation in Mexico to the Department, so that the question as to the actual existence of a state of war can be decided here.”⁵⁴ Wilson instructed “no overt act must be committed in the absence of specific orders from Washington,” emphasizing the need for restraint at this critical time.⁵⁵ The President was determined to maintain control of the situation.

The moment of truth with regard to Wilson’s Mexican policy had arrived. After hearing of the battle at Carrizal, a dejected Wilson wrote his confidant Colonel House:

The break seems to have come in Mexico; and all my patience seems to have gone for nothing. I am infinitely sad about it. I fear I should have drawn Pershing and his command northward just after it became evident that Villa had slipped through his fingers; but except for that error of judgment (if it was an error) I cannot, in looking back, see where I could have done differently, holding sacred the convictions I hold in this matter. Right or wrong, however, the extremest consequences seem upon us. But INTERVENTION (that is the rearrangement and control of Mexico’s domestic affairs by the U.S.) there shall not be either now or at any other time if I can prevent it! We as yet know nothing from our own officers about the affair at Carrizal We shall no doubt have heard from them before this reaches you.⁵⁶

Wilson notified the leaders of Congress from both parties of the fighting at Carrizal and told them to expect a presidential address before a Joint Session of Congress to request “that the President be and is hereby authorized and empowered to use the military and naval forces of the United States in any way that may be necessary to guard the Southern Frontier of the United States most effectively, if necessary to enter Mexican soil and there require the entire suspension, in Mexican states which touch and border upon our own, of all military activities of every kind on the part of Mexican authorities. . . .”⁵⁷ Even as war seemed more likely than ever before, the President had not completely given up hope that hostilities could be averted.

On 24 June Wilson also sent for his private secretary, Joseph Tumulty, to discuss “the present situation in Mexico.” The day prior, a detailed report arrived from Pershing explaining what happened at Carrizal, and it was evident that the hot-blooded Boyd was at fault.⁵⁸ No additional attacks on Pershing’s forces had been reported since the fighting. There was now some feeling that war could be avoided. In a stirring conversation in which “his eyes flashed and his lips quivered with the deep emotion he felt,” the President “unburdened himself and laid bare his real feelings toward Mexico.” Wilson told his friend:

Tumulty, you are Irish, and, therefore, full of fight. I know how deeply you feel about this Columbus affair. Of course, it is tragical and deeply regrettable from every standpoint, but in the last analysis I, and not the Cabinet or you, must bear the responsibility for every action that is to be taken. I have to sleep with my conscience in these matters and I shall be held responsible for every drop of blood that may be spent in the enterprise of intervention. I am seriously considering every phase of this difficult matter, and I can say frankly, to you, and you may inform the Cabinet officers who discuss it with you, that *there won’t be any war with Mexico if I can prevent it*, no matter how loud the gentlemen on the hill yell for it and demand it. It is not a difficult thing for a president to declare war, especially against a weak and defenceless nation like Mexico. In a republic like

ours, the man on horseback is always an idol, and were I considering the matter from the standpoint of my own political fortunes, and its influence upon the result of the next election, I should at once grasp this opportunity and invade Mexico, for it would mean the triumph of my administration. But this has never been in my thoughts for a single moment. The thing that daunts me and holds me back is the aftermath of war, with all its tears and tragedies. I came from the South and I know what war is, for I have seen its wreckage and terrible ruin. It is easy for me as President to declare war. I do not have to fight, and neither do the gentlemen on the Hill who now clamour for it. It is some poor farmer's boy, or the some of some poor widow away off in some modest community, or perhaps the scion of a great family, who will have to do the fighting and the dying. I will not resort to war against Mexico until I have exhausted every means to keep out of this mess. I know they will call me a coward and a quitter, but that will not disturb me. Time, the great solvent, will, I am sure, vindicate this policy of humanity and forbearance. Men forget what is back of this struggle in Mexico. It is the age-long struggle of a people to come into their own, and while we look upon the incidents in the foreground, let us not forget the tragic reality in the background which towers above this whole sad picture. The gentlemen who criticize me speak as if America were afraid to fight Mexico. Poor Mexico, with its pitiful men, women, and children, fighting to gain a foothold in their own land! They speak of the valour of America. What is true valour? I would be just as much ashamed to be rash as I would to be a coward. Valour is self-respecting. Valour is circumspect. Valour strikes only when it is right to strike. Valour withholds itself from all small implications and entanglements and waits for the great opportunity when the sword will flash as if it carried the light of heaven upon its blade.⁵⁹

The meeting with Tumulty was a defining moment in the presidency of Woodrow Wilson. It was now obvious that the President of the United States would not go to war with Mexico. Wilson found that public opinion was also opposed to an invasion, and this further emboldened him to find a peaceful solution. Since the fighting at Carrizal, the White House had been inundated with hundreds of cards, letters, and telegrams opposed to war or intervention.⁶⁰ On 30 June Wilson took a major step to reduce tensions between the two governments and remove the specter of war. Speaking at the Waldorf -Astoria Hotel to the New York Press Club, he received thunderous and at times deafening applause as he passionately defended his resolve that there would be no war with Mexico.⁶¹ When Wilson asked the listeners, "Do you think the glory of America would

be enhanced by a war of conquest in Mexico?” and “Do you think that any act of violence by a powerful nation like this against a weak and distracted neighbor would reflect distinction upon the annals of the United States?” the crowd of between 600 and 700 shouted in unison: “No!”⁶²

While Wilson was determined to avoid a war, he was hoping for a signal from Carranza that the First Chief was of the same mind. The first positive development from the Mexicans came on 28 June when Carranza ordered the release of the twenty-four Americans captured at Carrizal. The British Consul at Chihuahua reported that, while in captivity, the Americans were sufficiently fed, well treated, and even given ample room for exercise.⁶³ On 4 July, after reading the transcripts of Wilson’s remarks to the Press Club, the Mexican Secretary of Foreign Relations sent an affirmative note to Lansing in which he wrote, “I have the honor to state to your excellency that the prompt liberation of the Carrizal prisoners was a still further proof of the sincerity of the desire of this Government to reach a peaceful and satisfactory settlement of the present difficulties.” He closed with, “This Government, meanwhile, intends to use every effort at its disposal to prevent to the occurrence of new incidents which might complicate and aggravate the situation.” Carranza also suggested a joint commission to “seek an immediate solution” and discuss “the real cause of controversy between the two governments.”⁶⁴ The tide had turned. The last major crisis over the Punitive Expedition that might have lead to war between Mexico and the United States had passed.

The next step in the story of the Punitive Expedition was the establishment of a Joint High Commission to mediate the situation between Mexico and the United States. The agreement to form the commission was solidified through diplomatic channels in

July, but the talks did not begin until early September. This suited Wilson, who was furiously campaigning for reelection and entirely focused on his political fortunes. Carranza was also focused on domestic concerns and attempting to hold national elections, the first step in instituting a constitutional government.⁶⁵ Wilson and Carranza wholeheartedly supported the idea of mediation and promptly appointed their representatives to the commission. Wilson selected Secretary of Interior Franklin Lane, Reverend Doctor John Mott, and former Judge George Gray, all men of notable prestige. Carranza assigned Luis Cabrera, a confidant and revolutionary intellectual, along with Alberto Pani and Ignacio Bonillas, two men from his inner circle, as representatives. The first meeting on the commission was held in New London, Connecticut, on 6 September. The location was later changed to Atlantic City, New Jersey, and Philadelphia. During the meetings, numerous matters concerning Mexican-American relations were discussed in detail. The joint commission convened a total of fifty-two times over the next four months.⁶⁶

Beginning with the establishment of the Joint High Commission, the War Department found itself playing an increasingly minor role in the Mexican situation. Major General Tasker Bliss, the Assistant Chief of Staff, would serve as the U.S. military adviser and representative of the Secretary of War to the commission. Baker initially approached Scott to see if he wanted to serve as one of the three presidential delegates on the high commission, but the general demurred, saying “You will do me a very great kindness, Mr. Secretary, if you leave me off the list.” When asked why he did not want to serve on the commission, Scott replied, “Secretary Lane will be the chairman and because of his position as a cabinet officer he will completely dominate it, and my views

will receive scant attention.” He added “Those Mexicans are going to play horse with Secretary Lane all summer, and after it is all over no one will be proud of having been on the commission.”⁶⁷ Scott was correct in his assessment of the situation, as Bliss had only modest influence during the proceedings.

The formation of the Joint High Commission also signaled the end of significant operations by the Punitive Expedition in Mexico. Pancho Villa left his mountain hideout in September with between the 500 and 1,700 horsemen and, in an act of brazen defiance, captured Chihuahua City on 16 September. Villa remained in the city for ten hours before heading off into the wilderness, evading 6,000 pursuing Carrancistas. Pershing was forced to stand by and watch Villa’s resurgence, in that the general had received orders to hold his present position to avoid another crisis with the Carrancistas. The fate of the expedition had been settled for quite some time, and there was no possibility that Wilson or Baker would support resuming the active pursuit of Villa. The Punitive Expedition would remain static in Colonia Dublan until withdrawing from Mexico in early 1917.⁶⁸

Wilson was reelected President on 7 November 1916 by a narrow margin. With the campaign for the presidency over, he wasted no time in pushing for an end to the expedition. He began to pressure his representatives to find an accord with the Mexican delegation, and Baker began to demobilize quietly the National Guardsmen on the border at the rate of 6,000 per week.⁶⁹ On 24 November, the commissioners unanimously agreed to a protocol referencing the withdrawal of the American troops and the safeguarding of the international boundary. Under terms of the agreement, the Punitive Expedition would be withdrawn within forty days of the protocol’s approval by both heads of state. Furthermore, each country had responsibility for guarding its side of the international

border, and the Constitutionalist forces would occupy and adequately protect the territory evacuated by Pershing. Carranza inexplicably failed to approve the final document and the commission was forced to reconvene for further negotiations.⁷⁰ Remarking somewhat sarcastically on the turn of events, Scott wrote, “This after six months of words.”⁷¹ Sometime in December, Wilson and Baker agreed that the Punitive Expedition would be withdrawn from Mexico regardless of the results of the commission. On 17 January 1917, the Joint High Commission assembled for the last time and, while making progress on some issues, failed to ratify a final agreement for withdrawal of the American forces in Mexico. Link aptly described the atmosphere when he wrote, “Events now raced towards conclusion of the unhappiest chapter in the history of Mexican-American relations since the war of 1846-1948.”⁷²

On 18 January, the day after the final meeting of the Joint High Commission, Secretary Baker issued the preliminary order for the return of the Punitive Expedition back to the United States. The encrypted message read, “The Secretary of War directs that you inform General Pershing in code that it is the intention of the Government to withdraw his command from Mexico at an early date.”⁷³ Pershing began his movement north on 28 January and the last troops of the Punitive Expedition crossed into United States territory during the afternoon of 5 February. The news of the end of the expedition failed to make many headlines. A day prior, Lansing issued the “Memorandum on the Severance of Diplomatic Relations with Germany.”⁷⁴ President Wilson, Secretary Baker, and Chief of Staff Scott had little time to reflect on the Punitive Expedition; all three were already deeply involved in the next great crisis facing the United States.

¹Eisenhower, *Intervention!*, 242.

²For a detailed account of the action at Guerrero see Pershing, *Report of the Punitive Expedition*, 7-10, 14-16.

³Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace*, 196.

⁴Eisenhower, *Intervention!*, 271.

⁵Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1916*, 520.

⁶*Ibid.*, 514.

⁷*Ibid.*, 518-19.

⁸*Ibid.*, 518.

⁹Link, *Confusions and Crises*, 282-84.

¹⁰Pershing, *Report of the Punitive Expedition*, 3.

¹¹Johnson, *The Punitive Expedition*, 486.

¹²Pershing, *Report of the Punitive Expedition*, 15-17.

¹³For a detailed account of the *Sussex* crisis and the linkages with the Punitive Expedition see Link, *Confusions and Crises*, 222-79.

¹⁴A thorough account of the politics behind the decision to continue the Punitive Expedition is can be found in Johnson's *The Punitive Expedition*, 483-89.

¹⁵Scott, *Some Memories of a Solider*, 522-23.

¹⁶Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1916*, 523.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 513.

¹⁸Link, *Wilson Papers*, vol. 36, 502-3.

¹⁹Frank B. Elser, "Pershing Halts; Never Was Aided by the Mexicans" *New York Times*, 21 April 1916, page 1.

²⁰Link, *Confusions and Crises*, 287.

²¹Calhoun, *Power and Principle*, 59.

²²Link, *Wilson Papers*, vol. 36, 528-29.

²³*Ibid.*, 540.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵Link, *Confusions and Crises*, 287.

²⁶Link, *Wilson Papers*, vol. 36, 553-54.

²⁷Link, *Confusions and Crises*, 287.

²⁸Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1916*, 523.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 535.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 535-536.

³¹*Ibid.*, 538-539.

³²Link, *Wilson Papers*, vol. 36, 607-8.

³³Johnson, *The Punitive Expedition*, 525. Palmer, *Newton D. Baker*, 20.

³⁴Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1916*, 543.

³⁵“Conferees Announce Failure to Agree; Texas Border Again Raided by Mexicans” *New York Times*, 12 May 1916, page 1.

³⁶Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1916*, 552-63.

³⁷Link, *Confusions and Crises*, 298.

³⁸Johnson, *The Punitive Expedition*, 606-7.

³⁹Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1916*, 581-92.

⁴⁰Calhoun, *Power and Principle*, 63.

⁴¹Link, *Confusions and Crises*, 300.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 298-99.

⁴³Calhoun, *Power and Principle*, 276, n53.

⁴⁴Arthur S. Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 37, *May 9 – August 7, 1916* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 283-86; and Daniel R. Beaver, *Newton D. Baker and the American War Effort, 1917-1919* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 18 n35.

⁴⁵Scott, *Some Memories of a Solider*, 524.

⁴⁶For a complete description of the National-Defense Act of 1916 and the transition of the Organized Militia into the National Guard of the United States, see U.S. War Department, *Report of the Secretary of War, 1916* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1916). Numbers of mobilized troops taken from same report, page 13.

⁴⁷Johnson, *The Punitive Expedition*, 601.

⁴⁸Link, *Confusions and Crises*, 301.

⁴⁹Pershing, *Report of the Punitive Expedition*, 30.

⁵⁰U.S. War Department, *Report of the Secretary of War, 1916*, 9.

⁵¹Pershing, *Report of the Punitive Expedition*, 30.

⁵²See Johnson, *The Punitive Expedition*, 614-53, for the most detailed account of what happened at Carrizal and Boyd's aggressive state of mind.

⁵³Johnson, *The Punitive Expedition*, 654-55.

⁵⁴Link, *Confusions and Crises*, 307.

⁵⁵Calhoun, *Power and Principle*, 64.

⁵⁶Link, *Confusions and Crises*, 307.

⁵⁷Link, *Wilson Papers*, vol. 37, 304.

⁵⁸Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1916*, 596.

⁵⁹Tumulty, *Wilson as I Know Him*, 157-59.

⁶⁰For the heartening affect that public opposition to intervention had on Wilson in June and July of 1916, see Johnson, *The Punitive Expedition*, 659, and Link, *Confusions and Crises*, 315-18.

⁶¹Link, *Confusions and Crises*, 316-17.

⁶²Link, *Wilson Papers*, vol. 37, 332-34.

⁶³Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1916*, 597.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 599.

⁶⁵Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), 143-44.

⁶⁶For an interpretation of the Joint High Commission from the Mexican perspective, using primarily Mexican sources, see Stout, *Border Conflict*, 93-102.

⁶⁷Scott, *Some Memories of a Solider*, 524.

⁶⁸Johnson, *The Punitive Expedition*, 301-7.

⁶⁹Beaver, *Baker*, 19.

⁷⁰For a complete report of the proceedings from the Secretary of the American Section of the Joint High Commission see Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1917* (Washington: Government Printing Office: 1926), 916-38.

⁷¹Scott, *Some Memories of a Solider*, 530.

⁷²Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace, 1916-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965) 335.

⁷³Arthur S. Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 40, *November 20, 1916 – January 23, 1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 525.

⁷⁴Arthur S. Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 41, *February 7 – April 6, 1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 118.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS

This study has described the circumstances and decisions regarding the Punitive Expedition into Mexico from a strategic viewpoint. It began with a historical overview and background of U.S.-Mexican relations and the introduction of the three key leaders who are the primary focus of this study: President Woodrow Wilson, Secretary of War Newton Diehl Baker, and Chief of Staff of the Army Hugh Scott. The background information was followed by an account of Wilson's decision to authorize the Punitive Expedition, focusing on the roles of the War Department and its senior leaders, including an examination of the specific orders and supplemental guidance issued for the campaign. The thesis then followed the reactions and decisions of key policymakers during the deepening crisis and the ever-increasing possibility of war with Mexico. The narrative concluded with an account of the combat between Mexican and American forces on 12 April and 21 June 1916, the resulting threat of war, and the unceremonial end of the Punitive Expedition in early 1917.

President Wilson, Secretary of War Baker, and Chief of Staff Scott each influenced the formation, conduct, and outcome of the Punitive Expedition. Wilson was the central figure of the crisis and, as one would expect, personally involved in several key aspects of the campaign, four of which stand out and deserve special attention. The first was his approval of the White House press release on 10 March that plainly stated, "An adequate force will be sent at once in pursuit of Villa with the single object of

capturing him and putting a stop to his forays.”¹ This statement established the public perception that the capture and punishment of Villa were the campaign’s criteria for success. In doing so, the press release differed significantly from the orders issued by the War Department, which stated that the “work of these troops will be regarded as finished as soon as Villa’s band or bands are known to be broken up.”²

The President’s second major influence on the conduct of the Punitive Expedition was the issuance of comprehensive instructions on 15 March to be followed in dealing with Carranza’s forces once Pershing entered Mexico. These orders, in which Wilson articulated the “exact nature of the expedition” and directed “obedience in letter and in spirit to the following orders” affected Pershing’s operations.³ Third, the lengthy and extremely detailed instructions issued directly to Scott prior to the general’s conference with Obregón during late April 1916 came from Wilson’s personal typewriter and illustrate the President’s continued personal involvement in the crisis. Finally, but most important, was Wilson’s steadfast determination to avoid war at nearly any cost following the deadly fighting between U.S. and Mexican troops at Carrizal on 21 June 1916. One of Wilson’s most notable biographers, Ray Stannard Baker, accurately summarized the President’s contribution when he wrote: “It is not too much to say that if it had not been for Woodrow Wilson’s determination that the American nation should act always toward Mexico upon a plane of honour, tolerance, helpfulness, patience, consonant with our own power and responsibility, we should certainly have been at war: and good relations with the rising nations to the south of us which halve been developing so hopefully since that time might have been long delayed.”⁴

Secretary of War Baker played a more understated, but significant role, during the course of the campaign. His general acceptance of the recommendations from Scott as to the wording of the 11 March 1916 War Department orders and his concurrence with the selection of Pershing as the commander of the Punitive Expedition would prove significant as the campaign progressed. Baker's positive and productive relationship with the senior uniformed officers of the War Department, specifically Scott and Bliss, throughout 1916 and 1917 played a major part in ensuring harmony between the American civilian leadership and the military during this critical period. Lastly, and most important, Baker dedicated a major portion of the War Department's limited resources to the operation. His successful efforts to secure a fiscal year 1916 supplemental appropriation of \$20,811,259 (which was no small sum in 1916) from Congress for both the expedition in Mexico and the troops mobilized for border service is an example of the important role he played in this regard. He also heartily approved, although somewhat after the fact, the \$450,000 purchase of a fleet of trucks for transporting troops and supplies in support of the Punitive Expedition.⁵ Although not unto itself an extraordinary purchase, the support of this procurement was indicative of the type of action repeatedly taken by Baker that earned the trust and respect of the War Department generals during the crisis.

Chief of Staff Scott played several very important roles during the Punitive Expedition. His ability to persuade Baker that Villa's capture or whereabouts must not be the sole measure of Pershing's success and his subsequent construction of War Department orders authorizing the expedition had a significant impact on how the

operations were conducted in Mexico. His recommendation to select Pershing over Southern Department commander Funston, who was senior in rank and seemingly more fit for the task, also had a significant affect on the conduct of the expedition. Scott's most important role, however, began in April 1916 with the tense discussions he had with Obregón following the first clash of U.S. and Mexican troops at Parral on 12 April. He was almost solely responsible for the easing of tensions and diffusion of the crisis following that fight. It is entirely conceivable that had Scott abandoned the talks with Obregón, the United States and Mexico would have been at war beginning in May 1916. In his annual report of 1916, Scott justifiably praised the talks stating, "The conference furnished most beneficial results in materially relieving a very acute situation and in demonstrating to Gen. Obregón and other Carranza leaders the pacific intentions of our Government."⁶

A strategic analysis of the Punitive Expedition may be completed using a variety of criteria, all of which are valid and could be credibly measured. This study evaluates the campaign's strategy and its effectiveness by examining the clarity of the strategic objectives, adequacy of resources provided for the operation, and the potential benefits versus the consequences of the chosen military course of action. The analysis concludes with an interpretation of the strategic success or failure of the expedition.

The primary dilemma in conducting a strategic evaluation of the Punitive Expedition concerns which objectives to use as criteria. A choice must be made on whether to use Wilson's public statement that the single object of the campaign was the capture of Villa in order to prevent further attacks, or the War Department's formal

orders that defines success as the “work of these troops will be regarded as finished as soon as Villa’s band or bands are known to be broken up.”⁷ More appropriately, the conclusion on whether the Punitive Expedition was a strategic success or failure should be based on a combination of Wilson’s stated Mexican policy and the White House press release of 10 March. The difference of interpretations between the White House, War Department, and Department of State on the expectations of the Punitive Expedition is the a significant fault of the strategy behind the decision to send an expedition into Mexico - - the failure to identify clearly the strategic objectives relative to Pershing’s campaign.

The views of Baker and Scott regarding the effectiveness of the campaign are important to understand when conducting a strategic analysis of the Punitive Expedition. Baker had an interesting interpretation of the success of the campaign. Writing in his 1917 annual report, the Secretary of War emphasized that the expedition

. . . exercised by its mere presence a stabilizing effect in the disturbed territory for great distances beyond its actual base. Villa himself fled from one hiding place to another in the mountains and there the wounded fugitive cut too poor a figure to attract support; so that his activities and those of other lawless bands in Northern Mexico gradually ceased to menace the safety of our border.

In the meantime the Mexican people proceeded to establish more firmly their constitutional government, and the rule of order extended more and more widely throughout the Republic. . . .

The expedition was in no sense punitive, but rather defensive. Its objective, of course, was the capture of Villa if that could be accomplished, but its real purpose was the extension of the power of the United States into a country disturbed beyond control of the constituted authorities of the Republic of Mexico, as a means of controlling lawless aggregations of bandits and preventing attacks across the international frontier. This purpose it fully and finally accomplished.⁸

This report by the Secretary of War seemed to describe an American intervention, clearly at odds with Wilson's Mexican policy. That policy, as stated in Wilson's 1915 State of the Union, was opposed to American involvement in the internal affairs of Mexico. During the speech, Wilson emphasized, "Her [Mexico] fortunes are in her own hands. . . . We will aid and befriend Mexico, but we will not coerce her; and our course with regard to her ought to be sufficient proof to all Americans that we seek no political suzerainty or selfish control."⁹

Scott failed to comment on the Punitive Expedition in his annual report, which focused entirely on the war in Europe, but he did discuss the matter frankly in his memoirs. He began his assessment recounting the actions of the Secretary of State following the Cabinet meeting of 10 March. As Scott tells it:

[Secretary Lansing] was met by press correspondents, searching for news. He told them, "We are sending an expedition into Mexico to catch Villa."

This is what went out to the country. But we never did catch Villa, because circumstances halted the expedition before it could do so, and anyway there was nothing in the order about catching Villa himself. Our troops captured and killed many Mexicans, and brought some up for trial on the border in New Mexico. The band has never reassembled since. Pershing made a complete success in the accomplishment of his orders from the War Department point of view but the State Department, by putting out erroneous information, spoiled the effect in the minds of the public. Neither the State Department nor the Press, moreover, has ever corrected this unfortunate impression; in fact, this is, in all probability, the first correction that has ever been publicly made.¹⁰

Based on the research completed for this thesis, two groups of strategic objectives can be identified. One group represents Wilson's goals and priorities, the second group embodies the War Department's objectives and emphasis. The two groups are somewhat

similar in nature, with the difference between the two lying largely in the priority given a particular element.

When coupled with the President's Mexican policy in general, there are four specified and desired goals that can be derived from Wilson's guidance for the Punitive Expedition. First and foremost was his stated intent to capture and punish Villa for the Columbus atrocities. Second, he also needed to find a way to protect American lives and property along the international border as a matter of national sovereignty and security. Third, any military solution to enhance security in the border region had to allow the Mexican Revolution to progress without U.S. intervention, given the President's belief of the rights of self-determination. Fourth, any military course of action had to avoid war with Mexico.

Examining relevant documents and narratives from the War Department delineates a second group of strategic objectives, also containing four elements. First, the War Department leaders recognized the need to avoid escalation of the situation between the U.S. and Mexican governments. Second, they stressed the necessity to secure and stabilize the border, thereby reducing acts of violence against American interests in the region. This would be accomplished by dispersing and, if possible destroying, bands of marauders and revolutionaries determined to conduct cross-border raids. Third, officials at the War Department also saw a requirement to influence the situation in northern Mexico and, in so doing, stabilize the region, which they believed to be generally beyond control of the Carranza government. Fourth, and subordinate to the preceding three

objectives, was the actual capture of Villa, who was only part of a much larger security problem.

Although these strategic objectives relating to the Punitive Expeditions can be subject to considerable debate, it is obvious that the leaders in Washington provided more than adequate resources to conduct the campaign. Although Wilson and the War Department imposed significant written operational constraints on Pershing in an attempt to limit the possibility of war with Mexico, these restrictions did not necessarily hinder the pursuit of Villa. The instructions limiting Pershing's conduct were primarily focused on the delicacies of the situation with regard to the Carranza government and Mexican army. Pershing was never limited as to the number of troops he was allowed to use inside Mexican territory to hunt down Villa. In fact, at one point in 1916, nearly the entire Regular Army, with the exception of one cavalry regiment and the coastal artillery, were along the international border or a part of the expedition in Mexico.¹¹ When it came to the conduct of the actual pursuit of Villa and his men, Pershing had significant freedom of action and support from the War Department. He was allowed to deploy his forces as he best saw fit, and he was given the use of several important assets including the 1st Aero Squadron, comprised of eight Curtiss JN-2 Wright airplanes for reconnaissance. This was the first operational deployment of airplanes in support of military operations for the United States.¹² Pershing was also allowed to designate a considerable tract of territory as the Punitive Expedition's area of operations. The search for Villa covered hundreds of square miles, and even as tensions mounted with the Mexican government, Pershing was allowed to maneuver his forces within Mexico with relatively few

constraints from Wilson or the War Department. He received guidance to consolidate his forces in a more tenable position only after the combat with Mexican forces at Parral and Carrizal. This guidance was in large part due to strategic intelligence received at the War Department that hinted of a Mexican mobilization and preparations to drive the Punitive Expedition forcibly back to the United States.

The decision to send the Punitive Expedition into Mexico was a strategic miscalculation. The potential benefits of the campaign, even if wholly successful by either Wilson's or the War Department's standards, did not justify the likely consequences and costs of introducing a major American force into the country. A hostile reaction by the Carranza forces was inevitable, as the War College Division planners accurately anticipated. It is remarkable that general war between the United States and Mexico did not erupt in 1916 following the deadly combat between Mexican and American soldiers at Parral and Carrizal. As this study emphasizes, war was only narrowly averted on both occasions, mainly by the extraordinary efforts of General Scott in April and the steadfast determination of President Wilson in June.

The Punitive Expedition failed to solve the most fundamental strategic security challenge of the region during that time - - the protection of American lives and property in the vicinity of the international border. As seen during early May, Mexican bandits, probably not connected in any way to Villa, crossed the border with relative ease, killing several American citizens and stealing or destroying their property. The trend of violence along the border continued long after the Punitive Expedition ended. In June 1919, for example, a resurgent Villa and several hundred armed men attacked the Mexican town of

Juarez, across the international border from El Paso, Texas. Stray shot and shells from the fighting landed in El Paso, wounding several American citizens and two soldiers. The local U.S. commander received permission from the War Department to cross into Mexico to disperse the Villistas and push the fighting away from the border, a mission he promptly executed.¹³

The Punitive Expedition, in addition to not being worth the likely strategic consequences of triggering war with Mexico, was costly in other very real terms. According to Pershing's official report, twenty-seven American soldiers died during the conduct of the operation. He also reported Mexican casualties totaling 273 killed and 108 wounded.¹⁴ The fighting between U.S. and Mexican forces resulted in the expensive mobilization of the United States Militia and National Guard. Over 140,000 men were forced to leave their ordinary occupations as result of the crisis, negatively affecting local economies and employers from coast to coast. In addition to the \$20,000,000 supplemental appropriation for funding operations in and along the border with Mexico, Secretary Baker was forced to return to Congress in late 1916 to request the sum of \$2,000,000 to care for the dependents of mobilized soldiers, many of whom found themselves in dire financial straits resulting from the loss of income suffered after the provider was ordered to federal service.¹⁵

Justifying the campaign on the grounds that the Army's experience and lessons from the Punitive Expedition were exceptionally useful in preparing the United States for entry into World War I is misguided. The United States Army has proven on several occasions that rigorous peacetime training focused on combat skills, as opposed to

participation in small-scale contingencies, is a more effective course for preparing for war. Soldiers do not necessarily require a small war to prepare for a big war.

The Punitive Expedition was more of a failure than a success. Although the U.S. force in Mexico undoubtedly deterred some bandits from targeting Americans and their property, the expedition failed to capture Villa, which was the most prominent of Wilson's stated or implied objectives. Any other successes must be subordinated to that fact. The campaign also failed to bring lasting security to the international border, a long-term national interest in the area. To its credit, the Punitive Expedition, because of its limited nature, did not generally interfere with the internal struggle of Mexico, and it would be unfair to label the campaign as a classic American intervention. However, had an expedition never been authorized, there would have been much less American influence on Mexican internal affairs, which was, in the form of nonintervention, one of the primary ideological goals of Wilson's Mexican policy. The preeminent American diplomatic historian, Samuel Flagg Bemis, credits Wilson's restraint during the crisis as having "gained the good will of Latin America in general," even if the Punitive Expedition was a misguided effort.¹⁶

¹Link, *Wilson Papers*, vol. 36, 287.

²Pershing, *Report of the Punitive Expedition*, 3.

³Link, *Wilson Papers*, vol. 36, 322-24.

⁴Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson Life and Letters: Facing War 1915-1917* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1937), 82.

⁵Scott, *Some Memories of a Solider*, 531.

⁶U.S. War Department, *Annual Report of the Chief of Staff, 1916*. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1917), 188.

⁷Pershing, *Report of the Punitive Expedition*, 3.

⁸U.S. War Department, *Report of the Secretary of War, 1917*, 9-10.

⁹Arthur S Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 35, *October 1, 1915 – January 27, 1916* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 293-96.

¹⁰Scott, *Some Memories of a Solider*, 521.

¹¹U.S. War Department, *Annual Report of the Chief of Staff, 1916*, 189.

¹²Pershing, *Report of the Punitive Expedition*, 85-91, and Boot, *Savage Wars of Peace*, 194-95.

¹³Friedrich Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 706-7.

¹⁴Pershing, *Report of the Punitive Expedition*, 69, 97.

¹⁵U.S. War Department, *Report of the Secretary of War, 1916*, 14.

¹⁶Samuel Flagg Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the United States* (New York: Holt, 1955), 553 and Johnson, *The Punitive Expedition*, 842-43, n12.

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